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VOL. VI.

London:

Printed for J. Johnson; Otridge & Son; Faulder & Son; T. Payne; Wilkie & Robinson; Scatcherd & Letterman; J. Walker; Vernor, Hood, & Sharpe; R. Lea: J. Nunn; Lackington, Allen, & Co.; Cuthell & Martin; Clarke & Sons; G. Robinson; B. Crosby; Longman, Hurst, Rees, & Orme; Cadell & Davies; C. Law; J. Richardson; E. Jeffery; R. Floyer; J. Asperne; P. & W. Wynne; and W. Grace.

1809.

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E. Blackader, Printer, Took's Court, Chancery Lane.

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P. 7. l. 17. *for* Locke *read* Lock.
63. l. 2. from the bottom, *for* principal *read* principle.
130. note l. 5. *for* partem *read* partim.
225. l. 4. from the bottom, and p. 226. l. 1. *for* Tarah *read* Terah.
288. last, *for* appeared *read* appealed.
298. l. 2. from the bottom, *for* proceedings *read* proceeding.
378. l. 9. from the bottom, *for* them. *read* them,
472 note, l. 3, from the bottom, *for* apostised *read* apostatised.

ESSAY THE SECOND,

CONTINUED.

SECTION III.*

On the Propagation of Errour and Superstition,

AS beneficial as these men had been while they stood distinguished by knowledge and wisdom, or by pretensions to them, not by rank, as individuals, not as members of a particular order,

* I HAVE sometimes thought, and said, perhaps, in our conversations, that the life of mankind may be compared aptly enough to that of every individual, in respect to the acquisition of science. There is in both a state of infancy, of adolescence, of manhood, and of dotage, to be observed. The ideas of infancy are taken superficially from the first appearances of things to the senses. They are ill compared, ill associated, and compounded into notions for the most part either trifling and absurd. In adolescence, ideas increase and grow a little better determined. Experience and observation compare and compound them better. In manhood, the judgment is ripened, the understanding formed, the errours of former states are assumed to be corrected, and the farther progress of science to be more sure. Thus it should be, no doubt. But affections and passions multiply, and gather strength, in the whole course of this progress. What is gained one way is lost another: and if real knowledge increases,

der, they became hurtful, in many respects, when they composed a community within a community, had a separate interest, and, by consequence, a separate policy. I pretend not to consider how their power encroached on that of the state, and became independent on it, nor how their wealth increased, to the impoverishment of all other orders. We may guess at the ancient by what we know of the modern clergy, and may be allowed to wonder, that in those days, as well as in our

creases, real errour mixes and increases with it. Fancy may not impose as it did, perhaps, but it may incline strongly to errour; and authority and custom will do the rest. They will invert the whole order of science. Ignorant ages and ignorant nations will impose on the most knowing; and even in the same age and nation, infancy imposes on adolescence, and adolescence on manhood, till the great round is finished, and the philosopher, who began a child, ends a child.

Let this be applied principally to knowledge in the First Philosophy. Arts of all kinds, and many other sciences, have been improved not so much by building on old, as by laying new foundations; not so much by assuming implicitly principles, either ancient or modern, as by examining all, and adopting, or rejecting, or inventing, without any regard to authority. The very reverse of this proceeding has been practised in matters of the First Philosophy; and the professors of it at this hour, in the mature age of philosophy, do little more very often than repeat the babblings of it's infancy, and the sallies of it's youth. These men are more properly ancient philosophers than those whom they call so. They live indeed in the mature age of philosophy. But in this age, whenever metaphysics and theology are concerned, they seem to rush forward into a state of dotage, and affect to hold the language that the First Philosophy held, in Oriental, Egyptian, and Grecian Schools, before she had learned to speak plain.

own,

own, it has been found so hard to discover, that, though civil government cannot subsist so well without religion, religion may subsist and flourish too without ecclesiastical government. It will be enough for my purpose, to observe to what a degree of wealth and power this order arose in the nations we speak of, and to show how it propagated errour in philosophy, and superstition in religion.

As to the first, then, the reverend Magi in Persia had the province of teaching princes how to govern, and of assisting their pupils in government afterward. It was much the same in Egypt, where the priests had the peculiar right to admonish and to reprove, indirectly, at least, the kings. In Ethiopia, this prerogative was carried farther; for there the kings were ordered to die whenever the priests thought fit, till a sacrilegious king, Ergamenes, I think, arose, broke into the sacred college, and put these ghostly tyrants themselves to death. This did not happen neither till the bloody inquisition had been long in possession of this power, if Ergamenes lived about the time of the second Ptolemy. The wealth and the immunties of this order were as exorbitant as the authority and power. We may learn from Diodorus the Sicilian, not only, that this order had raised itself to a partnership in the sovereignty, but to an exemption from all impositions and burdens; for the members of it were "participes imperii---"cunctis oneribus immunes," and they had also one third of the whole property of Egypt. As to their immunities, there is an astonishing instance

in the book of Genesis. The miserable people were obliged, in a great famine, to sell their lands to the king for bread. But the king gave bread to the priests; they ate their fill, and kept their lands.

To speak now of the manner in which, and the reasons for which, this order of men propagated errour in philosophy, and superstition in religion, let it be considered, how necessary it was for them to maintain that reputation of sanctity, knowledge, and wisdom, on which this esteem and reverence had been founded. They had provided themselves many supports, in the form and constitution of the Egyptian and other governments; but they saw, at the same time, like able men, how necessary it was to continue in force and vigour the original principles of the empire they had over the minds of men, on which all the rest depended. The general scheme of their policy, therefore, seems to have been this. They built their whole system of philosophy on the superstitious opinions and practices, that had prevailed in days of the greatest ignorance: and, by consequence, their principal object was false, not real science. Real science would have discovered their fallacies in a multitude of instances; and it would have served their chief purpose effectually in none, if they had left it unsophisticated. Besides, men began to rise, as Tully expresses himself, "à necessariis ad elegantiora." They might therefore have been overtaken by some who were not of their order, in real, or have been detected in

in fantastical science. It was fit, therefore, that they should guard against both these accidents; and they did so with much cunning. They multiplied and exaggerated their pretensions to such kinds of knowledge, as every man was conscious to himself that he could not acquire; and yet as every man was prepared to believe, according to the prejudices of the age, that they had acquired by traditions, derived from ancient sages, or even by divine illuminations, and a correspondence several ways carried on with gods and dæmons. But still they did not rest their security even on this alone. They had other expedients, and they employed them artfully and successfully. Most of their doctrines were wrapped up in the mysterious veil of allegory. Most of them were propagated in the mysterious cipher of sacred dialects, of sacerdotal letters, and of hieroglyphical characters: and the useful distinction of an outward and inward doctrine was invented, one for the vulgar, and one for the initiated; that is, one for those to whom it was useless, or dangerous, to trust their secret; and one for those, the ability, credulity, or enthusiasm of whom they had sufficiently tried by a long noviciate. Among the first, allegory passed for a literal relation of facts, and hyperbole was the common style. Among the last, all was fraud or folly. We see enough of the first in the Old Testament, to make both probable. Much in this manner, I think, that the corruption of the First Philosophy was established in Egypt and the East, from whence it spread to

distant countries and distant ages, after it became a trade in the hands of men, in whom the characters of philosophers and priests were confounded.

It would be tedious and useless, to descend into many particulars concerning the various systems of polytheism and idolatry. Let us content ourselves with making some few observations, that may point out the propagation of errour in natural theology, as it descended from the Egyptians and other nations to the Greeks. To be particular about the rise of it would be ridiculous affectation. It arose long before the men, who appear to us to have been the first teachers of it, existed. Pherecydes, of Syros, who writ in prose, and philosophised out of verse and song the first among the Greeks, was the master of Pythagoras and Thales, who founded the Italic and Ionic sects, and lived, therefore, later than the fiftieth olympiad. Homer and Hesiod lived, indeed, before the institution of the olympiads, and perhaps much about the same time; though Tully, or Cato*, places your blind man long before the other.

But I am far from thinking, that Homer meant his Iliad and Odyssey should pass for philosophical poems; though it has been the madness of pedants, almost from his own age to ours, to extol him and censure him as a philosopher. He meant to flatter his countrymen, by recording the

* Cic. de Senect.

feats

feats of their ancestors, the valour of some, and the prudence of others; and he employed for the machinery of his poem the theology of his age, as Tasso and Milton have employed that of theirs. Had Arnobius, and much more such a weak philosopher as Justin, or such a warm rhetor as Tertullian, lived in our days, you would have been attacked in your turn, and have been made the father of Rosycrusianism, and of all the silly doctrines about sylphs and gnomes; just as reasonably as Homer has been attacked, by the zeal of Christian writers, for teaching polytheism and idolatry. I believe, too, that you would have been as well defended by your commentator, by his interpretations of your allegories, and by his explanations of the hidden sense of the Rape of the Locke, for instance, as Homer was by those who found out a hidden sense in all his fables, and who judged, that he must have been very knowing in natural philosophy, because he mentions sun, wind, rain, and thunder, for which you laugh at Politian and others of his learned admirers*.

They who have represented Homer as a great philosopher, have made themselves ridiculous. They who have represented him as the great author of polytheism, idolatry, and superstition, have done him wrong. Many ancient bards flourished long before him. Who they were, whether the name of Orpheus, for instance, was

* Pref. to the Iliad.

given to different persons, like that of Pharaoh, and that of Zoroaster, very probably; whether it was derived from a Phœnician, or Arabian word, that signified knowledge, as Vossius thought; whether no such man as Orpheus ever existed, as Aristotle thought; or whether the verses ascribed to him were writ by a certain Cecrops*, as the Pythagoricians pretended, it matters little. We may reason in this case much as Tully does about Atlas, Prometheus, and Cepheus †; and we may conclude, that the fabulous anecdotes, with which old traditions were crowded about Orpheus, to mention the most famous only, and the doctrines he taught, and the mysteries he instituted, prove at least thus much, that Egyptian theology and many of those superstitions had been imported into Greece long before Homer lived. We may easily figure to ourselves, with what advantage this theology, and these superstitions, were introduced among the rude, illiterate, and, at that time, half-savage Greeks, from a nation as famous as the Egyptian, and by men, whether Egyptians, Phœnicians, or Greeks, who had been the scholars of priests, prophets, seers, and magicians; of holy men who saw visions, and dreamed dreams, and enjoyed every sort of divine communication, in a country, where dynasties of gods had ruled so long. Plato had the front, in a much more enlightened state of Greece, to publish his own whimsies, or those of Pythagoras, in his Timæus,

* De Nat. Deor. l. 1. † Tuscul. Quæs. l. 5.

on

on the faith of men begotten by gods, and therefore well aequainted with their fathers. Might not these missionary poets, or their masters, pass for such sons of the gods, in the dark ages we refer to? Or, might not that divine fury, the sure mark of inspiration, be ascribed to them, which was believed to seize the sibyls, and which seized the prophets, and the sons of the prophets, among the Jews; nay, even those who happened to fall in their way, as we learn from the Bible, that it seized not only Saul, but even the men he had sent to take David.

We may believe, that Homer's predecessors went about singing their spiritual and moral canticles, philosophical rhapsodies, and heroical ballads, as tradition reports that he did after them. What became of their hymns or canticles we know not, whether any were preserved, or when they were lost. But lost they were, which the scattered fragments of his works had been likewise, if they had not fallen by accident into the hands of Lycurgus, as Plutarch, whom you cite for this fact, relates; and if Solon had not perfected the compilation of them, as Diogenes Laertius relates, whom I wish you had cited likewise, to show, that the two greatest legislators of Greece published the two first editions of Homer. In this manner his writings became the sole repertory to later ages of all the theology, philosophy, and history of those which preceded his. All the scribblers of Greece imitated, and pillaged them, and none more than Plato.

Solon

Solon had studied philosophy in Egypt, under the two most celebrated priests of Heliopolis and Saïs, and had learned even the Atlantic language, according to the report of Plato. This consideration might influence the legislator strongly, in favour of a poet who had been skilled in the political, mythological, and every other part of Egyptian knowledge, above three centuries before he went to that school for instruction. But the general reputation of Egyptian wisdom, the beauty of those poems wherein they found, or imagined that they found so much of it interspersed, and the loss perhaps of what their first poetical reformers had committed to writing, if they had writ any thing, might raise the esteem for Homer among all the Greek philosophers, to that exorbitant and even ridiculous height, to which in fact it rose. As soon as the rage of making complete systems of philosophy, wherein theology and legislative knowledge had always a principal share, began to be the prevailing mode in Greece, every system-maker thought it necessary to be armed with the authority of Homer: and they did for this purpose, the same thing by his writings, that St. Jerom says, somewhere or other, was done by the sacred writings, every one endeavoured to drag them to his sense, even when they were contrary to it. "Scripturas trahere "repugnantes."

The poems of Homer, and the whole Pagan theology, like embroidered or painted curtains, coarsely wrought by superstition first, and afterward

ward enriched and heightened in their colouring by the imaginations of poets, hid the true scene, wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found, from vulgar sight, which they amused with gaudy and grotesque figures, out of the proportions and forms of nature, divine or human, instead of showing this scene in that simplicity, in which it will appear to every sober eye. The true scene, wherein the principles of natural theology are to be found, was signified, perhaps, in that remarkable inscription on a temple at Saïs, which Plutarch mentions, however differently that may have been interpreted. "I am all that "has been, is, and shall be, and my veil no "mortal has ever yet removed." This veil represented the works of God, in which and by which alone he is to be discovered, as far as he has thought fit to communicate any knowledge of himself. Beyond this veil the eye of human reason can discover nothing. By the help of these images, we may form a just and clear notion of the different ways by which men run into errour, on this important subject: the generality, by neglecting to contemplate God in the works of God: philosophers, by attempting to remove the veil, to contemplate God in his nature and essence, not in his works alone. The vulgar personified, deified, and worshipped the works, without looking up to the worker, as their poets had taught them: the generation of the visible world was to them a generation of invisible gods; for they had taken ideas of power and wisdom, of good

good and evil, from the phænomena; and they personified and deified not only these, but affections, passions, and almost every complex mode that the human mind can frame. When they were in this profuse mood of deification, we cannot wonder if they deified those men from whom they had received great benefits, nor if tutelary heroes became tutelary gods. Some of the philosophers, having been led by a more full and accurate contemplation of nature to the knowledge of a Supreme self-existent Being, of infinite power and wisdom, and the first cause of all things, were not contented with this degree of knowledge. They would explain, they would even analyse the divine nature. They made a system of God's moral as well as physical attributes, by which to account for the proceedings of his providence; and reasoning thus beyond all their ideas, by a certain agitation and ferment of the mind, they remained in the labyrinths of absurdity they had formed; acknowledging the existence of this Monad, this Unity, elevated above all essence and all intelligence, and yet neglecting to worship him; conforming to the practice of idolatry, though not to the doctrines of polytheism.

But how true soever all this may be, and much more to the same effect, that might be added, yet the great principle, that maintained all the corruptions of natural religion, was that of priestcraft. Philosophers and priests were the same persons long; as I imagine, that bards and philosophers

had been before: and when they assumed their distinct characters, the priests were too powerful, and the people too bigotted, to hope for any reformation. An opposition to the grossest superstition, or a disbelief of that rabble of the sky, those gods of different ranks and different employments, those celestial husbands and wives, fathers and children, brothers and sisters, would have passed for atheism; and the best of men would have been reputed atheists, and have been treated accordingly, as Socrates was. It was in these countries then, as it is in several countries now. Nothing was too absurd for stupid credulity to receive, nor for artifice, emboldened by success, to impose. Sham miracles were shown, like other false wares, in a proper light, and at a proper distance: and those errours, which had contracted the rust of antiquity, became, for that reason alone, venerable. In short, the whole scheme of religion was applied then, as it is in many countries, Christian and others, still, to the advantage of those who had the conduct of it. The worship of one God, and the simplicity of natural religion, would not serve their turn. Gods were multiplied, that devotions, and all the profitable rites and ceremonies which belonged to them, might be so too. The invisible Mithras would have been of little value, without the visible, to the magi: and a calf or a cat, nay garlic and onions, were more lucrative divinities in lower Egypt, than Kneph had ever been in the upper.

But farther: it was not the First Philosophy alone

alone that was thus corrupted, but every other part of science, that could be wrested and misapplied to the same purposes. The priesthood held it, in Egypt, and in the other countries from whence the Greeks derived their knowledge, to be a maxim of ecclesiastical policy, and a wise one it was, to keep every part of science like a monopoly in their own hand, and to be of some real use to mankind, in that manner at least. On this principle, they cultivated arithmetic and geometry. Arithmetic might be of use to them, in order to calculate the number of their gods and dæmons, or the revenues they enjoyed; which was no easy task: geometry might help them to set out the bounds of their possessions, and serve to other temporal purposes; for they had not yet discovered, as some modern writers have done, how well geometry may be applied to prove the immortality of the soul, and to the solution of other metaphysical and theological problems. But they had still more use for physic and astronomy, to both of which they applied themselves with industry and success, and both of which they made subservient to their great design. "Medi-" cina animi," physic for the soul, was the title of some books of Mercury, that were carried in the famous procession described by Clement of Alexandria. It may be, that the principles and rules of theurgic magic were laid down in those sacred writings, and that the Egyptian priests pretended to raise themselves and others, by the observation of these rules, to such a communion with

with the gods, as to employ their divine power and knowledge whenever they were necessary. But the physic conversant about bodily substances only produced another sort of magic, which may be called natural; since it consisted in this, that the effects of causes very natural were ascribed by ignorant people, not indeed always and absolutely to a supernatural power, but always to a power and knowledge above those of any other men than their magicians; and that a good chemist was deemed, like our friar Bacon, a conjurer. Thus again astronomy, which had been cultivated long under the name of astrology, dwindled into that contemptible science which is at this day so justly distinguished from it. From considering the motions, men grew attentive to the supposed influences of the stars; and that ridiculous scene of fraud opened itself, which continues still to impose in the East, where astrologers, who cannot make an almanack, govern princes and nations, by pretending to read their destinies in the sky.

The whole system of mythology and Pagan theology was so absurd, that it could not have been introduced into common belief, if it had not begun to be so, like other absurd systems of religion, in times of the darkest ignorance, and among creatures as irrational as Greenlanders, Samojedes, or Hottentots; if after that, errour and knowledge growing up together, the former had not outgrown the other, and maintained itself against

against the improvements of human reason and of knowledge, by the force of habit; and finally, if legislators had not thought it dangerous to cure, and useful to confirm superstition: and yet, after all, much art was necessary to keep it in repute, beside the craft that has been already mentioned, as well as to make it answer the design of legislators.

Allegories, that passed for facts, the fraud of oracles, the impertinence of parables, that pretended to some meaning, and of fables that pointed at none, except it was to encourage vice by the example of their gods, composed an outward religion, supported a ridiculous worship, and served to amuse the vulgar; for in divine matters, the marvellous, the improbable, nay the impossible and the unintelligible, make the strongest impressions on vulgar minds. It has been said, that mysteries are designed to exercise our faith, and allegories our understanding; but nothing can be more foolishly said. A mystery, that is, a thing unknown, may exercise our understanding just as well as our faith, and can in truth exercise neither. We may have faith in an authority we know, but it is faith in this authority, and not properly in the mystery, which makes us acquiesce in it. An allegory may be contrived to puzzle and perplex the understanding, or to hold out nothing to us but itself. In the first case it is impertinent, in the second it is fraudulent, and in both it perverts the sole use it should be employed for, in the didactic, or even in the poetical style. Such allegories

allegories become, at best, and when they have really some meaning, a sort of riddles: they are fit to exercise the sagacity, and to be the intellectual amusement of children alone, and yet they have been the pride of great genii. Josephus, who was a Jew and a cabalist, admired them much: and he tells a silly story, on the authority of Menander of Ephesus, to give them credit, or to raise our ideas of the wisdom of Solomon, Hiram, and Abdemon. The two first had, it seems, a curious correspondence, in which they proposed riddles to one another, and the Tyrian paid most of the forfeits, till Abdemon taught him to pose the wisest of men. Plato*, who disgraced philosophy as much as Homer elevated poetry, by the use of allegory, declared, that this poet, whom he banished in another mood out of his commonwealth, should not be read by any who were not initiated in wisdom; that is, who were not able to draw a hidden sense out of his writings; that is, who were not able to make their own inventions pass for the significations of his fables, and the interpretation of his allegories. Allegory, in the true intention of it, is designed to make clearer as well as stronger impressions on the mind; and, therefore, as they who pretend to foretel future events should be suspected of imposture, when they deliver their predictions, like those who governed the oracles of the heathen world, in obscure and equivocal

* In Alcib.

terms, that may be applied afterward, as they often were, to different and even contrary events; so they, who pretend to teach divine truths in allegorical, symbolical, or any mysterious language, deserve to be suspected of imposture likewise. There may be good reasons for concealing, there can never be any such for disguising, which is a degree of falsifying truth. If men reasoned a little better than they do commonly, and were a little less blinded by prejudices, they would not be such bubbles as to receive, on one authority, what comes to them really on another. The obscure prophecy, and the abstruse doctrine, when one is interpreted, and the other explained, are not so properly the prophecy of the prophet, nor the doctrine of the doctor, as they are such of the persons who apply the prophecy to some particular event, and determine the doctrine to some particular sense, neither of which was possibly intended by them.

Rapin says, in his comparison of Plato and Aristotle, that the symbolical theology of the Egyptians seemed to them the most respectful manner of treating divine subjects; and he quotes Jamblicus for this observation, that they thought themselves obliged to imitate nature on these occasions, who hides the perfections of the mind under the outward veil of the body. Now the first of these excuses will appear ridiculous enough, if we refer it only to the opinions of men. But if we refer it to any divine revelation, it is still more egregiously absurd. The last is an allegorical

gorical excuse for allegory, worthy of Jamblicus, and little worthy of a remark. But the Jesuit gives, in the same paragraph, the true and universal reason, so universal and so true, that I wonder at him for giving it, of all figurative theology. "The priests," he says, "who had the keeping of these mysteries, au-"thorised this method to support their credit, "and to draw veneration to themselves by the "respect for those holy things which they hid "from the eyes of the people, that they might "not be profaned."

I cannot let this subject go, without taking notice of what my lord Bacon says upon it, in the preface to his treatise, which he calls "De Sapi-"entiâ," and might have called more properly, "de futilitate, sive de insania veterum." In that, he makes parables and allegories so essential to religion, that he affirms, that to take them away is to forbid almost all commerce of things divine and human*. Whatever reasons this great author had to make such a declaration, it was rashly made. The expression is allegorical, but the meaning of it is obvious; and therefore I say, that as far as man is concerned in carrying this commerce on, we are justified in suspecting it of enthusiasm or fraud; since allegory has been always a principal instrument of theological deception.

* ——— cum ejusmodi velis et umbris religio gaudeat, ut qui eas tollat, commercia divinorum et humanorum ferè interdicat.

The Chancellor admits, that it serves to involve and conceal, "ad involucrum et velum," which is a direct contradiction to it's proper use, for that is to enlighten and illustrate, "ad lumen et illus-" "stationem." He chose to say nothing of the former, rather than to be engaged in disputes, "potius quam lites suscipiamus," and we may add, rather than offend the clergy. For me, who think it much better not to write at all, than to write under any restraint from delivering the whole truth of things as it appears to me; who should think so, if I was able to write and go to the bottom of every subject as well as he; and who have no cavils nor invectives to fear, when I confine the communication of my thoughts to you and a very few friends, as I do in writing these Essays; I shall repeat what I have said already, that the philosopher or divine, who pretends to instruct others by allegorical expressions without an immediate, direct, and intelligible application of the allegory to some proposition or other, has nothing in his thoughts but the supposed allegory, and is mad enough to deceive himself, or knave enough to attempt to impose on those he pretends to instruct. If he has any thing there which he distrusts, and dares not venture to expose naked and stripped of allegory to the undazzled eye of reason, it is too much even to insinuate in such a case, and especially on subjects of the First Philosophy. We may compare such theology as this to those artificial beauties, who hide

hide their defects under dress and paint: "pars "minima est ipsa puella sui."

If we suppose the Supreme Being concerned in this commerce, as it is called, we suppose what is very profane and audacious. I apply my lord Bacon's words, "profanum quiddam sonat et "audax." Can any thing be more so, than a supposition, that the God of truth communicates with men by a wretched human expedient, contrived by them to deceive one another, or to help their imperfect faculties in the conception of things, and in the impression of their conceptions? Tully * entertained, in this very respect, much more worthy notions of the divine nature. He argues against the vanity of divination by dreams, in answer to his brother, on this principle. If they come from the gods, they are sent for the sake of man: and if they are sent for the sake of man, we ought to believe, that all such advertisements must be intelligible to man †. Obscure dreams therefore cannot be such advertisements. They would be repugnant to the majesty of the gods §. When God speaks to his creature, it will be always in terms plain and precise. "Hoc ne "feceris. Hoc facito." Thou shalt have none other gods but me. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The Stoics thought to evade

* De Divin. l. 2.

† Intelligi à nobis dii velle debebant ea, quæ nostra nos monebant. Ibid.

§ Obscura somnia minimè consentanea sunt majestati deorum. Ibid.

this objection against divination by dreams, when they set up their sage, that ideal being, for the sole diviner *. But Tully laughed at all these pretensions to a supernatural virtue and knowledge, which Chrysippus made necessary to divination. He affirmed he knew no person who had them, and concluded from thence, that, if he should allow divination, there would be no one found to divine †. Thus may we laugh too, and affirm, on long experience, that, if we allowed theological allegory to come from God, with all the pretended types, symbols, and signs, there would be no one found to interpret it, so as to fix the sense of it indisputably: and yet, if the sense be not indisputably fixed, human imposture may pass for divine relation, and the word of man for the word of God.

If I would enter into such a detail, in this place, it would be easy to collect almost innumerable examples out of Jewish and Christian writers, to excuse the laugh, and to justify the affirmation. But instead of that, I shall content myself with giving one or two instances, that occur to my memory, of the use that was made of interpretations of allegory in the Pagan theology.

* ——— Stoici autem tui negant quemquam, nisi sapientem, divinum esse posse. Cic. de Divin. l. 2.

† ——— Vide igitur, ne, etiamsi divinationem tibi esse concessero——neminem tamen divinum reperire possimus. Ibid.

Stobœus

Stobœus has preserved a passage of Porphyry, which shows, that the Pythagoricians laboured to discover the hidden sense of Homer, who had spoke more darkly about gods and dæmons than any of the ancients, in order to confirm or improve their own theology by his: and he quotes one of these philosophers, Pythagoreus Chronius, who seemed to make the poet's doctrine conformable to his own, rather than to make his own conformable to the poet's*. But the Stoics were remarkable, above all others, for putting Homer and the rest of the poets to this use. Hesiod was put to the same use; and his fables and allegories served to the same impertinent purpose as those of Homer did. His poem was to some, what he professes, at the entrance of it, that he intended it should be, a theological rhapsody concerning the generations of gods. It was to others a mere physical allegory concerning the formation of the visible world; and accordingly we find, that Velleius accuses Zeno, in the first book of the nature of the gods, of misinterpreting Hesiod, by attributing the names of Jupiter, of Juno, and Vesta, to inanimate beings alone. Varro, it is said, did the same: and thus the poem became to some a theogonia, and to others a cosmogonia. Another instance of the success philosophers had in their interpreta-

* Nec tam se ad poetæ opiniones, quàm poetam ad suas accommodare nititur.

tions of allegories and fables, and of their end in making these interpretations, follows that which has been quoted: for after speaking of what Chrysippus had writ in his first book of the nature of the gods, Cicero's interlocutor adds, that this philosopher endeavoured, in the second, to accommodate the fables of Orpheus, Musæus, Hesiod, and Homer to what he had advanced, "ut etiam veterrimi poetæ, qui "hæ ne suspicati quidem sint, Stoici fuisse vide-"antur." That the most ancient poets, who had not even a suspicion that there were any such doctrines, might seem to have been Stoicians. Such examples as these are so far apposite, that they serve to show how ill fitted allegory is to preserve the true sense of any doctrine, and that an allegorical system is easily made a nose of wax, to be turned any way that the interpreters of it please.

While Paganism was thus muffled up in allegory, to amuse the vulgar, and to maintain and propagate superstition, another art, in some degree the reverse of this, was employed to promote the true ends of natural religion, and the more effectual reformation of the manners of men. The art I mean is, that which instituted rites and ceremonies to be performed, and doctrines, to which they were relative, to be taught in secret. Ancient writers, Pagans and Christians, speak much of these mysteries, for such they were called: the former with veneration, the latter often with an abhorrence, that little became those who imitated them

them in so many instances, and who suffered their own mysterious rites to run easily into the very same abuses, into which the others degenerated late. To attempt a minute and circumstantial account of these mysteries, and even to seem to give it, would require much greater knowledge of antiquity than I pretend to have, or would take the trouble of acquiring. They who attempt it have been, and always will be, ridiculously and vainly employed, while they treat this subject as if they had assisted at the celebration of these mysteries, or had at least been drivers of the ass who carried the machines and implements that served in the celebration of them. They write dogmatically about things, which could not be known authentically, nor in a detail of particulars, at the time they were in practice. Diagoras, the Melian, was proscribed at Athens for revealing, or pretending to reveal them *: and the poet Æschylus had like to have been massacred, on a bare suspicion that the people took, at a representation of one of his plays, of something which alluded to them †. In a word, these rites were kept secret, under the severest penalties, above two thousand years ago. How can we hope to have them revealed to us now, by the help of tradition, or history, wherein we find the relations of other things which were of publick notoriety, much later, so imperfect and dubious? I pretend, therefore, to nothing more than the mention

* Suidas. † Clem. Alex. Strom. l. 2.

of

of a few general notions concerning these mysteries, which seem probable to me: whatever weight you lay upon them, about which I am not over solicitous, they will be sufficient for my present purpose, and for your information, They will serve to show, how men came nearer and nearer to the knowledge of the true God, and a more rational worship.

The theology and the mythology of the heathen world were, no doubt, vastly increased by poets, who indulged their imaginations without any other view, perhaps, than the ornament of their works; and by philosophers, who having, like Plato, more imagination than knowledge, endeavoured to conceal their ignorance under the veil of allegorical physicks and chimerical metaphysicks. Thus gods, and dæmons, and other hypothetical beings were multiplied. Festivals and public devotions multiplied with them. Superstition spread, and external religion, which was made up of nothing else, flourished. But they who instituted religion, for the sake of government, saw, that such religion as this would not be sufficient alone to answer their end, nor enforce effectually the obligations of public and private morality. It looked no farther than the present system of things, and in this they observed no settled distinction made by their gods between the religious and the irreligious, the best and the worst of men. It was not sufficient, they thought therefore, either to justify the providence of the gods, or to determine the conduct of men. The imaginary unjust

distribution of good and evil had been at all times a great stumbling block to theistical philosophers: and we see, accordingly, that hypotheses, contrived to solve the difficulty, had obtained in an antiquity beyond our oldest traditions. Such was that of the good and evil principle. Such was that of a future state of rewards and punishments, and of a metempsychosis. Now what they had put to a philosophical, they put to a political use: and the last of these was at least one principal, and, I suppose, the principal doctrine taught in the mysteries that they instituted.

The mysteries of Isis and those of Mithras seem to have been the most ancient: and the former were those which Inachus and Orpheus carried into Greece. What they were in their original institution, how they were propagated in several countries, under the invocation, to use an expression of your church, of different divinities, what alterations from one to another they received, or how those of Eleusis came to be more universal and more revered than the rest, I am unable to tell, and you I believe not much concerned to know. But if you ask me how they came to be called mysteries, though their principal doctrine, the doctrine of a future state, was publickly known, as I think it was, my answer is ready. This doctrine, although known, and the solemn rites that belonged to it, were mysteries among the Pagans, just as the doctrines and rites of baptism and the Lord's supper were mysteries

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in the first ages of the Christian church. A general and confused notion of them transpired. But neither these doctrines, nor the mystical rites and ceremonies, were explained even to the catechumens, and much less to others. Nay, the whole inward doctrine of the eucharisty was not opened to all those who received it, to those whom St. Austin calls "tardiores:" and the reason he gives for this reserve is, that they might not despise what they saw, "ne contemnant quod "vident." He thought, it seems, that no explanation would prevent this so effectually as an air of mystery, maintained by the figurative and ænigmatical terms, in which the fathers affected to speak on all such subjects to the publick. This precaution was carried so far, that a curtain was drawn to hide the altar and the priest from the sight of the congregation, when he was about to consecrate, as I remember to have read in some of your writers. Several ages passed, before pastors of the church thought it safe to let the people know, that a few genuflections, a few signs of the cross, a few thumps on the breast, and the muttering of a few words, were sufficient to draw God down from Heaven, and to transubstantiate bread and wine into his flesh and blood.

This air of mystery produced not only the negative good that has been mentioned, it produced likewise a positive good of much consequence. The Christian fathers found it necessary, on one hand, to admit converts through several stages of preparation into the church, and, on the other, to keep

keep up the fervour of these candidates for regeneration, and the consequence of it, salvation. The expedient of mystery answered both purposes. It kept them out of the whole secret, as long as that was necessary; and it excited, in the mean time, their curiosity, and holy impatience, to be in it. St. Austin, who mentions the first, mentions the second purpose. He speaks, in one of his epistles, of the publick prayers made to God, that he would inspire the catechumens with a desire of regeneration; "Ut eis desiderium rege-"nerationis inspiraret:" and in another part of his works, he avows the human means that were employed, for a very human reason, a reason drawn from the weakness of the human mind. He says, that although the catechumens could have borne a communication of the sacraments to them, this was not done, however, that the more honourably these sacraments were hid, the more earnestly this communication might be desired by them. "Etsi catechumenis sacramenta fide-"lium non produntur; non ideo fit, quod ea ferre "non possunt; sed ut ab eis tanto ardentiûs "concupiscantur, quanto honorabilius occultan-"tur."

Other authorities might be cited, and other instances produced, if they were necessary; for this was the general policy of the Christian church. But there is no need of any authority to confirm that of St. Austin, in such a case as this: and the two instances I have brought are sufficient to show, for what reasons mystery was established in the

the Heathen devotions, by showing those for which it was introduced and maintained in the Christian devotions. The latter, in this respect, were copies of the former: and these copies, which we have in our hands, enable us to judge of the originals, which we have not.

The Christians, the primitive Christians themselves, could not revere their sacred mysteries more than the Pagans did theirs. They could not prepare for them, nor assist at them, with greater attention of mind, with greater purity of heart, nor with greater reverence and awe, than the Pagans prepared for and assisted at theirs. The Pagans confessed their crimes; and they went through public and private purgations, which we may call penitences, long before they could be admitted to initiation. Such, for instance, as abstinence from women, and from several sorts of food, with different austerities, that are mentioned by Porphyry, and that writer of Milesian tales, Apuleius; after which the publick proclamation, "procul ite profani," and the private examination of every one who presented himself, "an "purus ades?" followed constantly. No man, who was noted for crimes, durst be a candidate for initiation: and Nero, as much an emperor and a tyrant as he was, durst not present himself as such, after he had killed his mother. We find the dispositions and the manner, in which they were required to assist at these mysterious rites and ceremonies, described in terms that might edify the most pious and orthodox ears. Let

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me quote the first that occurs to me, though it is not the strongest that might be produced, with the pains of a little search. The passage is in that oration, which Tully made on the occasion of some answers given by the haruspices, whom the senate had consulted. In the oration, speaking of those mysteries which Clodius had polluted, and exaggerating the crime, he takes notice, that they were such as forbid, not only curious, but even wandering eyes, and excluded not only the wicked, but the imprudent. "Non solum cu-
"riosos oculos excludit, sed etiam errantes—
"quô non modò improbitas, sed ne imprudentia
"quidem, possit intrare." Such was the general character, such the particular behaviour, required of the persons initiated into these sacred mysteries: and the excitements to the observation of all that was thus required could not be greater; since they are summed up by Tully, who had been initiated himself, in this, that the initiated learned how to live with joy and to die with better hopes; "cum lætitia vivendi ra-
"tionem, et cum spe meliore moriendi*." They were raised "ad præsentiam et participationem
"deorum," says Jamblicus; a blessing which the Egyptians first enjoyed, according to him. Their souls were purged and purified, till they became such as they had been in their original state, and before their descent into the prison of the body. When they left the body, they took their flight at once to the islands of the blessed, nay they became

* Cic. de Leg. l. 2.

gods

gods, or like to gods, according to some seraphic doctors of Platonician divinity; while those of the profane, unpurged, unpurified, and clogged by the gross affections of the body, stuck in dirt and wallowed in mire *.

SECT. IV.

On the Practical Attempts that have been made to reform the Abuses of Human Reason.

It is easy to conceive, by this short account of the heathen mysteries, how well this inward religion, for such I may call it, in contradiction to vulgar paganism, was calculated to form some particular men to virtue and piety, and to promote, by consequence, so far the good of society, which was the great end of the first legislators, by means more reasonable than those of vulgar religion. The celebration of these mysteries lasted several days, and returned often enough, to afford frequent opportunities of initiation to those of both sexes who were desirous of it, as well as of confirmation and improvement to those who had been already initiated. Lessons of morality were thus frequently renewed, habits of piety were solemnly maintained; and to enforce them all, that great sanction, which consists in the rewards and punishments of another life, and which had been added very wisely to the law of nature by human institution, and in belief, at least, if not originally and by divine institution,

* In cœno et luto volutari. Diog. Laer.

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was inculcated so, that every man must apply it to himself, and the impression be lasting.

It may be said, perhaps, that no reformation of manners, no degree of virtue and piety, beyond those which vulgar paganism was sufficient to procure, can be justly ascribed to these institutions; whereas they maintained much, at least, of the same rank polytheism in belief, and the same rank idolatry in practice. If this be said, the objection will be easily answered, as far as it relates to the effect they had, by running a parallel, as I shall do in another Essay, between Pagan and Christian reformation of manners; for if it appears, as I think it will, that the latter has in this respect on the whole no advantage to boast above the former, some reformation must be allowed to have been wrought by the pagan system of religion; after which there can remain no dispute, whether this reformation was owing to the inward and hidden, rather than to the outward and public part of this system.

But I consider here the theology and religion of the Heathen, with regard to their nature, not to their effects; and I shall proceed therefore to observe, that, by the mysteries hitherto spoken of, I mean only such as are called the less, and as seem to have been preparatory to the greater, which remain to be spoken of. There were certain stages through which men were admitted, by slow steps, into the whole mystery of Christianity. So they were admitted likewise into that of heathenism. The first legislators contented

themselves to establish a vulgar religion, in compliance with the ignorance and superstition of the savage vulgar. But they prepared, at the same time, the means of supplying it's defects, and of leading men, little by little, and by such a progression as their talents and characters rendered them capable of making, to a better knowledge of natural theology and natural religion; from fiction to truth, from allegory to that which allegory was intended to signify. There was a state of purgation, a state of initiation, and a state of consummation. The two first were, I believe, those of the less, and the last, that of the greater mysteries.

He who has been curious to examine the religious notions of rude, ignorant, and half stupid people, in the pale of the Christian church as well as out of it, will not be apt to wonder, that there were many in the heathen world who remained contented with the vulgar religion, and little curious about the mysteries; nor, that they were led, rather by example than by reflection, to initiation, when it became almost as general among them as baptism is among us, and to the belief of a future state. Now such as these might have been revolted against the mysteries, if they had found the gods they were accustomed to adore wholly degraded in them. These gods, therefore, were to keep their places in some sort, "suus cuique honos;" though many fabulous stories about them were exploded, or else were represented as allegories not facts, and explained

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in a better sense. The doctrine too of a future state of rewards and punishments would have made less impressions on such minds, perhaps, if it had not been taught to the eyes, as well as to the ears, by solemn ceremonies and pompous shows. Ceremonies, therefore, and shows seem to have been instituted, and to have been made parts of these mysteries. But then there were other persons, and the number of these increased as philosophy came to be more and more cultivated, who could not bear to have the absurdities of polytheism, however mitigated, imposed upon them in any sort, nor think it religion to worship men who had been made gods by poetical licence, with all their vices about them. They could not assist at the ridiculous rites of idolatry, nor be spectators of all the puppetshows of devotion, without being provoked to laughter or to indignation.

I can easily believe, that the foolish creeds and the burlesque rites of paganism were rendered, in the preparatory mysteries, a little less shocking to the common sense of those in whom knowledge began to get the better of prejudice. But this reformation and improvement could not be carried far at once. Allegory served to disguise ignorance, and to muffle up even knowledge in mystery among the vulgar. To cure this abuse, to take off these masks, and to lay allegory aside whenever it did not serve to illustrate truth, and to improve or facilitate knowledge, required time: and men, who had been bred in darkness, were to be accustomed to the light by degrees.

This, I imagine, that the mysteries did, and were contrived to do. If too much light had been let in at once upon the initiated, they would have been dazzled and hurt by it. Rather than suffer the grossest objects of their superstition to be suddenly removed, these idiots might have clung to them the more closely: just as we have seen in France, that popular tumults have arisen, when some bishops have attempted to take away images, and to forbid devotions, in which the common people had been too long indulged, by the connivance or by the fraud of their pastors. On the other hand, the reformation of vulgar religion, which was wrought by the less mysteries, was too little certainly for those who were able to frame true notions of a Supreme Being, and of the worship due to him from his creatures. Thus it became necessary to make a sort of political composition with errour: it became necessary for the institutors of religion to separate the few from the many, and to carry the first on alone from initiation to consummation, from the less to the greater mysteries. There are good, and, I think, sufficient grounds to be persuaded, that the whole system of polytheism was unravelled in the greater mysteries, or that no more of it was retained, than what might be rendered consistent with monotheism, with the belief of one Supreme Selfexistent Being. Now on the principles on which this was done, some of the established ceremonies of vulgar religion might seem quite innocent, and others might be tolerated. Some indulgence,

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and even a kind of occasional conformity to them, could not be safely refused, in countries where such superstitions had long prevailed; where they were incorporated into the very frame of government, and where powerful bodies of men had a particular interest in the support of them.

SECT. V.

Since I have mentioned the compatibility of some remains of the grossest polytheism with monotheism, and the principles on which the few might conform to the many, at least in the exteriors of religion; it is necessary that I should explain myself on these heads, which contain the sum of theology, or the First Philosophy, as it was understood by the most intelligent of the heathen, even in those countries where idolatry seemed to triumph the most.

It cannot be proved, without the help of the Old Testament, nor very well with it, as I have hinted above, that the unity of God was the primitive belief of mankind: neither does it appear to my apprehension, that in fact it could be so, according to all the rules of judging that may be drawn from reason and analogy. But yet I think it sufficiently evident, from reason and analogy both, that this first and great principle of natural theology could not fail to be discovered, as soon as some men began to contemplate themselves and all the objects that surrounded them, and to push

their philosophical researches up from causes, that must be the effects of other causes, to a first, intelligent, selfexistent Cause of all things. Accordingly, we find that this discovery had been made in Egypt, and all the eastern nations that were famous for learning and knowledge, long before the dates of our most ancient memorials: whereas the same discovery does not appear to have been made by those people, whom we are able to view in these memorials, before they emerged out of ignorance into the light of knowledge and philosophical truth.

If I would descend into particular proofs, to confirm, by the testimony of ancient writers, what I advance on a probability, that reason and analogy will support, I should not be at a loss to furnish them. But I consider, that the work is done to my hands, in a much better manner than I should be able to do; and that it would be ridiculous to display my little pedlar's shop of learning before you, when so immense a storehouse of it lies open in the true intellectual system of the universe. There you will find a full and superabundant collection of proofs, that demonstrate, beyond a possibility of doubting, the unity of God to have been acknowledged by the most ancient of the idolatrous nations; though they may not demonstrate, as I think they do not, that this was the primitive faith of mankind: because we see, that the things of this world are in a perpetual rotation, and because in several countries, at several periods, men may have gone

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from idolatry to true religion, and have fallen from this back again into idolatry; as we know that divers nations have gone from barbarity to politeness, and then have finished the round, and have returned from politeness to barbarity. Eusebius, and a multitude of other writers after him, would have us believe, that it was the particular prerogative of God's chosen people to be in possession of this knowledge, though the contrary may be proved, even from his own writings, as well as by the confession of St. Austin, and of other fathers of the church: and Josephus* asserts, that Abraham was the first who dared to say, that there is but one God. Abraham seems, according to this historian, to have derived his knowledge of the one true God from philosophical observation and meditation, before he became so well acquainted with the Supreme Being as he was afterward, when God entered into a covenant with him. He could not derive it by tradition from his ancestors; since Josephus, and Philo, and many of the rabbins, affirm, that the father of the faithful was bred an idolater. Shall we think it strange now, that other men should discover, by their meditations on the works of God, what Abraham discovered? Has this fundamental article then, of all true theology, so little proportion to our clear and best determined ideas? Or is it so repugnant to all the phænomena of nature? Much otherwise. It is so well proportioned to one, and so agreeable to both, that we shall be justly

* Ant. Jud. l. 1, c. 6.

surprised to observe the affectation of restraining this knowledge to the patriarchs and their descendants, if it was not as easy as it is to discern, that the Jews meant to do greater honour to their nation, and to reflect greater authority on their revelation; and that the Christians thought it proper to maintain this groundless assertion, in order to show the preparation for, as well as the necessity of, a new revelation to the Jews and Gentiles both.

But let us not be deceived, by the vanity of one, nor by the artifice of the other. God never left himself without a witness, which witness is the whole system of his works; though human reason must be cultivated to discover this, as well as other truths, and though it has not been therefore discovered alike by all people, and at all times. All truth requires some search, and many are to be acquired by labour. But there is no one that requires less labour than this, as there is no one that deserves or rewards our search so well. Thus I think, and, in thinking thus, I adore the goodness of the Supreme Being. Bishop Wilkins says, in his Principles of Natural Religion*, that "the "things which distinguish human nature from all "other things are the chief principles and foun-"dations of religion: namely, the apprehension "of a deity, and an expectation of a future "state after this life, which no other creature be-"low man doth partake of----it is not reason in "the general, which is the form of human nature;

* L. 2, c. 1.

"because

" because there are some degrees of ratiocination " discernible in the brute creation, and such a " natural sagacity as at least bears a near resem- " blance to reason." Thus the good bishop makes the difference between reason in man and in other animals very rightly to consist in the degree, not in the kind, without perceiving how far this concession of an apparent truth would carry him in the dispute about souls, and material and immaterial spirits. But even in the case before us it will not serve his purpose, nor evince that reason, as it is determined to actions of religion, is the particular form of human nature. It will prove, at most, that some men have, and that no other species of animals has in general, nor in particular instances, the faculty we call reason, in such a degree, as to render them capable of discovering the existence of the Supreme Being, and the duties of natural religion. I said some men, because even among the creatures that are all commonly, but perhaps erroneously, comprehended in this species, on account of their outward form, there are stupid savages, of whom it seems lawful to doubt, whether they are able to make greater discoveries concerning God and religion, than the half reasoning elephant. Upon the whole matter, they who suppose all men incapable to attain a full knowledge of natural theology and religion without revelation, take from us the very essence and form of man, according to the bishop; and deny, that any of us have that degree of reason, which is necessary to distinguish our species, and sufficient

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to lead us to the unity of a first intelligent Cause of all things.

Now, since the unity of God might be known by a due sense of human reason, and since it was actually known to the ancient legislators, who established the mysteries spoken of, for the support of religion, and religion for the support of government, it cannot seem marvellous, that this doctrine was taught in the celebration of the greater mysteries. The marvel would be, if it had not been taught in them. But then there is as little room to wonder, that the same men should establish the belief of a divine monarchy, as they did establish it. By degrading the pagan gods, they destroyed the aristocracy of Heaven: and by reasoning from human ideas of order, they ran of course into an hypothesis, which has been adopted in some manner or other by the Jewish, the Christian, the Mahometan, and every other system of theology. They supposed, that the making and governing the world required the ministration of a multitude of inferior beings, beings not eternal, but produced in time by emanation, or by some other inconceivable manner of generation; concerning all which there has been more absurdity propagated by Pagans and Christians, whether heretics or orthodox, than all the Bedlams of the world can match. When they reasoned à posteriori, from the works to the existence of one God, they reasoned well, and they arrived at truth. But when they reasoned in the same manner, from œconomical and political institutions of human

human wisdom, they reasoned ill, and fell into errour. This errour however was pious errour: and pious errour is more excusable than pious fraud. They dared not presume to suppose the supreme, incomprehensible, and ineffable Being employed constantly, nor at all immediately, about human affairs; and yet they thought divine providence necessary in the general conduct of these, as they discerned plainly, that it was necessary to preserve and rule the great machine of the universe. Much less dared they suppose this Being to be the tutelary local divinity of any one people, and much less still to be an earthly king, in the literal acceptation of the word. They were not enough familiarised with the belief of divine revelations, to frame such conceptions as these.

Some of their philosophers, indeed, refined so sublimely their speculations about the Supreme Being, that they grew quite unintelligible. God was, in their conceit, above all essence, though existent; above all intelligence, though intelligent. He was in all things:

"Jupiter est quodcunque vides, quocunque moveris."

He pervaded, he animated the whole world, and, like the soul, gave life and motion to all the parts of it. In him they lived, and moved, and had their being. Some of these men, therefore, while they seemed to worship the parts of this visible corporeal system, might really worship the invisible God alone, in the various manifestations of his

wisdom, energy, and power. I say some of them; because it must be confessed, that some, even of those who had been consummated by admission into the greatest mysteries, were not intirely orthodox on this head. They adopted notions more intelligible, and less unworthy of the Deity, than many that have been mentioned, but such however as had too near an analogy to man and to the affairs of mankind. They imagined a divine monarchy, on a human plan; the administration of which was not carried on by the immediate agency of God himself, but mediately, as in terrestrial monarchies, by that of inferior agents, according to the ranks and the provinces allotted to them. Such were the celestial gods, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, or the spirits more properly who inhabited and presided in them, who directed their motions, and maintained their influences. Such again, but in a lower order, were the æthereal and aërial Dæmons, the Genii, and the Lares, who dwelled below the moon, and had little else in charge but what related to man, and even to particular men. Such again were heroes and public benefactors, who might well be admitted into the celestial hierarchy; for by the very doctrine of the mysteries, private devotions, and the exercise of private virtues could render men like to gods here, and gods hereafter.

Since greater purity of manners, and a more internal devotion were required of the initiated than of the vulgar, it is but reasonable to conclude, that in the mysteries the gods were reformed

formed as well as their worshippers; that Jupiter was no longer the whoremaster he had been represented, nor Mercury the pimp, nor Venus the common strumpet, and so on. But still it must be confessed, that those fictitious divinities, which superstition and poetry had invented, which the less mysteries had preserved, and which the greater had tolerated, were alike numerous and ridiculous, as well as the rites and ceremonies instituted in honour of them, and practised even by those who were consummated in the greater mysteries. Thus in the Eleusinian orgia, for instance, not to quote those of Bacchus, the most extravagant and the soonest corrupted of any, the wanderings of Ceres in search of her daughter were dramatically represented: and the initiated ran about like frantic people with lighted torches in their hands.

If this apparent idolatry moves your indignation, call to mind the distinction of a worship of latria and a worship of dulia. They, who acknowledged but one God, could pay the first to that God alone: they could not be idolaters. They might honour the other divinities, as your church honours her saints, by the second. If this ridiculous worship moves your laughter, have a care: it was in those days just as it is in ours, and in Paganism just as it is in Christianity. The intelligent Pagans, who were consummated in the mysteries, could explain away, no doubt, some of the apparent absurdities of these rites, and give good prudential reasons for their compliance with

with others. Celsus had boasted, that he was fully acquainted with the Christian religion, and on that supposed acquaintance had presumed to censure it. Origen, as I find him quoted by Cudworth, shows Celsus, that it was not less impertinent in him to pretend to be well informed of Christian theology, than it would be in a stranger, who sojourned in Egypt, to pretend to be well informed of the Egyptian theology, though he had not been instructed in the mysteries of it by the priests, who were alone able to instruct him. Origen adds, that not only among the Egyptians, but among all other nations, who had, beside their religious fables, a secret doctrine, the religious rites were performed rationally by ingenious persons, while the superficial vulgar looked no further in the observation of them than the external symbol or ceremony. This was a full answer to Celsus: and so far Origen makes the case of Paganism and Christianity the same.

Now if they were the same in his time, sure I am they are the same in this respect in ours: and that you may see this the more clearly, and learn not to pass too rash a censure on the poor Pagans, let us feign for a moment, that Abammon, or any other heathen priest you please, is risen from the dead. He is curious in the first place to visit Egypt and the East; but he finds them subdued by ignorant and barbarous people, and no traces left of their ancient civility, policy, and erudition. The countries devastated, the cities laid in ruins, and none of the colleges of the learned

to

to be found. He hastens away to the West; for he is told, that, in those regions that border on the Atlantic sea, arts and sciences have revived, and philosophy has fixed her throne. As he advances thither, he finds some faint resemblance of the plenty and of the magnificence of ancient Egypt. Stately temples strike his eye, and excite his curiosity the most. He observes, that one is dedicated to the Trinity. He takes this to be some triad into which Typho had mangled the deity, and he laments that Isis had not joined the parts again together; for he cannot be supposed to know what the Nicean Council has decreed for this purpose. He observes, that another is dedicated to the mother of God, and imagines that Cybele may be adored in it. Others he observes in great number, and all distinguished by some particular invocation. While he is thus employed, a procession comes by. Abammon sees with pleasure the priests of Isis attend it in their white garments, and with their heads shaved, according to the Egyptian rite; but he is at a loss to guess what a cross of wood, which is carried before them, can mean. He remembers, that malefactors were executed in some countries on such an instrument of cruelty; and therefore his surprise increases when he is told, that the Son of God suffered on it, to satisfy divine justice, and to expiate the sins of mankind. This calls to his mind, perhaps, the human sacrifices that were so long in use among the Phœnicians and other nations. But he is still in doubt; for among them men

men were sacrificed to appease the gods, and here a god is the victim. He follows the procession into one of the temples. The service begins; he gets as near the altar as he can. He sees no preparations for any sacrifice, but observes that the priest holds something white and round in his hand. He asks what it is, and is told that it is a wafer. He observes him pour some liquor into a cup. He asks, and is told that it is wine. A moment after the priest, having held up this wafer and this cup successively over his head, the people prostrate themselves in acts of adoration. They bid him do the same; for they assure him that the wafer is become the body, and the wine the blood of God. The service over, he has time to survey the church. He sees altars on every side, and pictures or statues over all. He sees tapers and lamps burning even by day. The pictures and statues he concludes to be the gods of this people, and the tapers and lamps to have been lighted at some sacred fire, at that perhaps which Zoroaster brought from Heaven. He stares at an old man, with a long beard, looking out of the clouds, at a young man tied to a stake and whipped, and at a white pigeon hovering in the midst of the picture. As he proceeds on his journey of curiosity, he sees, in another temple, the same old man talking to a beautiful virgin, the virgin seeming to receive orders from him, and thrusting a little child head foremost into a mill, four monstrous beasts, such as Africa never produced, assisting twelve venerable persons to turn

the mill, before which an archpriest, with a triple crown on his head, and a golden cup in his hand, is represented kneeling. The archpriest receives wafers that fall from the mill into the cup. He gives them to a man who wears a red cap; the man of the red cap gives them to one who wears a broad pointed cap; he of the broad pointed cap gives them to one who wears a square black cap; and he of the black cap doles them about to the people. Abammon observes, over the door of the same temple, an animal that has four heads, the head of a man, the head of an ox, the head of an eagle, and the head of a lion. He observes an ass, to whom peculiar respect seems to be paid, and whole flocks of sheep, and whole droves of cattle. These he takes for symbols; and they have so plain an allusion to those of Egypt, when Egypt was the mistress of symbolical theology, that Abammon would be ready to carry himself back to his own age and country in imagination, if the herds of swine, that have their place too in this sacred painting, did not give him a good deal of scandal. The people he converses with swear to him, in the most solemn manner, that they adore one God alone, and that they abhor polytheism and idolatry. He hears them, takes his leave, and goes away persuaded, that they are polytheists as much, and idolaters more than he or any of his fathers were. This fable may serve to show you, that it is not only unreasonable, but unsafe, to censure any religion rashly and without sufficient information, as Pagans have calumniated

Judaism and Christianity, and Jews and Christians, Paganism and Mahometanism. The weapons of retaliation are always at hand, though those of defence are not: and we see, that even the Christian religion is not invulnerable. But it is time I should proceed to other corruptions of philosophy, of the first especially, and to other forms under which errour has been propagated.

SECT. VI.

WHAT has been said above, has been said generally and hypothetically; for what man in his senses would presume to be particular, or positive, on matters of so great antiquity, and so imperfectly and darkly delivered down, on authorities for the most part very precarious? I think, however, that it is probable. It is probable, that allegory, the refuge of ignorance, the veil of errour, and the instrument of metaphysical and theological deception in it's abuse, was one great support of Paganism. It rendered the outside of this religion pompous and showish: and this was enough to raise and to maintain a respect and veneration for it in the minds of the vulgar, who never look further than the outside, and who are fond of the marvellous. It is probable, that in the mysteries instituted by the first legislators to be a further support of religion, such allegories and symbols as were kept in use, and such as were more rationally invented for instruction, not for deception, were explained in such a manner as to serve

all the purposes of morality, and to form men to be better citizens, by making them better men, than it was thought that civil laws and institutions alone could oblige them to be. It is probable, in the last place, that the few who were consummated in these mysteries, and to whom the hidden doctrine was revealed, acknowledged the unity of the Godhead, learned to join a sort of mitigated polytheism with monotheism, and, though they conformed in the publick worship, to have their private belief, as I am persuaded, that you have yours.

It is plain enough, that the knowledge of the one true God would have been acquired by men, and would have been preserved in the world, if no such people as the Jews had ever been: and nothing can be more impertinent than the hypothesis, that this people, the least fit, perhaps, on many accounts, that could have been chosen, was chosen to preserve this knowledge. It was acquired, and it was preserved, independently of them, among the heathen philosophers, and it might have become, nay it did probably become, the national belief in countries unknown to us, or even in those who were fallen back into ignorance before they appear in the traditions we have; just as it became the first principle of religion among the inhabitants of the Theban dynasty *, who held, that there was no God but one, and this one

* Plut. de Iside et Osiride.

God was represented under a human figure by some, with an egg, the symbol of the world, coming out of his mouth; with a sceptre and a belt in his hand, and with other emblems. Thus he was described by Porphyry, as Eusebius relates; and what other Being can we understand to be meant by this description, but that God who spake, and the world was made?

Thus the theology of the heathen was founded on original truth; but was corrupted afterward, as other theologies have been, in it's progress, and by the extension of it. The heathens, at least all of them who deserve to be quoted, acknowledged one sole Supreme Being, the oldest of all Beings, according to Thales, because unmade or unproduced, that is, selfexistent, and because he alone is so *. But then they corrupted their ideas of the majesty of this Being, by those which they had of human majesty; for, by meaning to think with more reverence, they thought unworthily of God. They lost sight of him, if I may be allowed such an expression, and suffered inferior imaginary beings to intercept a worship due to him alone. They reasoned so little or so ill, on other notions much better associated with this notion of a God, such as those of omniscience, of omnipresence, and of that energy of omnipotence which is sufficient, by one simple act of the will, for thus we must speak to speak intelligibly, to create and govern a universe, that they thought it much

* Diog. Laer.

more

more agreeable to nature and truth to account for all the phænomena of the physical and moral worlds, by supposing the agency of second and third gods, of supercelestial and celestial divinities, and of dæmons, than to have recourse to the First God, who dwelled in darkness unpenetrable, or in light that blinded the human sight; for both these images were employed, and both signify the same thing. Thus they attempted to reconcile monotheism with a sort of mitigated polytheism; for such, at least, I think it was rendered by those consummated in the mysteries, and such I called it before; though Plutarch says expressly, in the place I have just now quoted, not only, that the most ancient Egyptians held the unity of God, but also, that they believed no mortal could be a God; which opinion was sufficient of itself to degrade numberless beings, that went under the vague and equivocal denomination of gods.

This system, made up of monotheism and of something very near akin, nearer than they who held it imagined, to a polytheism, inconsistent with the former, proved itself to be a very rank soil: and immense crops of errour sprung up from it, of errour more ingenious, and more plausible, than the superstitious opinions of savage nations, but yet as real. Though the belief of many inferior gods did not destroy the belief of one Supreme, it maintained, however, a sort of idolatrous worship, since it maintained a sort of

polytheism. For, as we cannot suppose that the vulgar, the uninitiated, adored the true God even intentionally, so we cannot suppose that the initiated, nor even the consummated, held constantly in mind some such casuistical distinction as that of latria and dulia, when they offered sacrifices to other divinities and invoked them directly. That learned man, Cudworth, seems to think more favourably even of the vulgar, somewhere in his famous fourth chapter; and I am not ignorant, that the doctrine of a mediation between God and man was established in the heathen theology. But I know too, that the suspicion I have may be justified by the example of Christians, who hold a mediation likewise: and of these the former seem the most excusable. The Christian believes, that he may have access at all times to the throne of grace; but the poor heathen, filled with a religious horror, durst not approach the divine monarch, except through the mediation of his ministers. Æthereal and aërial dæmons stood in the lowest rank of superior powers. To these he addressed himself, if they were evil to soften their malice, if they were good to obtain their mediation with the celestial, and, by them, with the supercelestial gods. He who durst not presume to think, that the prayers of men could reach to these, might offer up sacrifices and prayers to those.

Philosophers and priests, who led the multitude in matters of science and religion, were the same

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men in Egypt, and the ancient kingdoms of the East, for many ages, how much soever they were distinguished in later times, and in other countries. While they continued such, they profited alternately, in one character, of what they did in another. Philosophers in prose and verse helped to fill the calendar of the priests: and theology became the assistant of philosophy wherever she was wanted. Thus, in the case before us, when philosophers had once established a divine monarchy, at the head of which they placed the First God, enthroned in darkness, or hid by excess of light, creating and governing all things by several orders of inferior beings, there was a sort of gradation formed from man to God, most inconsistently with some other of their notions. In favour of this gradation, and to make it appear the shorter, the souls of men were deemed immortal, and of a celestial origin. They were raised up, at least, to the very confines of divinity: and dæmons, and beings superior to dæmons, had little precedence above them, if any. They were confined indeed to human bodies, and degraded to animate these systems of organised matter by a temporary union with them, but they returned afterward to their proper and kindred stars. The others were confined too, and had their respective powers and provinces allotted to them, in the general government even of sublunary affairs.

Theology did not fail to build on foundations philosophy had laid: and the professors of both

improved the opportunity they had of feigning a close correspondence between Heaven and Earth. They assumed, that they had the means of knowing what was decreed above, that they could disclose the will of the gods, avert their anger, procure their favour, and exercise a coercive power over dæmons. They imagined spirits that belonged to the several planets, fiery and aërial, aquatic and terrestrial: so that men, and not men alone, but all other animals, plants, metals, and stones, partook of these different natures, and of the different influences which descended from above. The distinction of good and evil dæmons was extremely useful, in accounting for the physical and moral phænomena; and it doubled the fees of the priests. Accordingly, this distinction had been established in the remotest antiquity, when philosophers did, what they do still, and instead of tracing causes up gradually from their effects, take the less laborious task of inventing them at once, and by a sally of imagination. Justin, the martyr, found our christian devil precipitated from Heaven, in the nineteenth book of Homer's Iliad. Plutarch quotes Empedocles for writing, that the evil dæmons had been driven from thence by the gods: and you may have the word of Marsilius Ficinus, in his dissertation on the apology of Socrates, that Plato had heard in Egypt how Jupiter cast the impure dæmons into Hell, as well as he had learned from Pherecydes of Syros, either by tradition, or by his writings, how several of these spirits had rebelled against

against God, under the conduct of Ophioneus. These reprobate spirits became the instruments, or rather the authors of all physical and moral evil; and the protection of such as had not fallen from this purity was sought, to prevent or remove this malignant influence. The one procured to men peace of mind, and health of body. The others inspired lusts, inflamed passions, and, entering into the bodies of men as well as of other animals, tormented and distorted their limbs, and played a thousand extravagant pranks in the wantonness of their power and malice.

Such absurdities as these, and many others which I will not take the trouble to collect, being grafted on a few true principles, composed the theological wisdom of the Egyptians and the Chaldæans, and corrupted the whole mass. I say their theological, for their political and moral wisdom deserves to be mentioned without a sneer. The relations of it, and of the effects of it, which we find in Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, and other ancient authors, inspire us with admiration and respect: and it is not possible to account for the folly and madness of men on these theological subjects, who were so reasonable and wise on all others, except by resolving it into the vanity of philosophers and the craft of priests. If these men had pretended to none of this chimerical knowledge, but had contented themselves to teach, in the simplicity of truth, the little we are able to know of the divine nature and the first philosophy, their systems, which they had the rage of extending

extending, would have been too narrow for their vanity; and their wealth, which they had the rage of increasing by this lucrative trade, would have been too little for their avarice.

It is hard to say which was greater, the impudence of their pretensions, the art with which they conducted them, or the success they had in imposing them on mankind. The sky was spread, like the great volume of fate, before them. They and their adepts alone could read in it, and discover the secrets it contained. The whole mystery of celestial influences was known to them alone. They could procure them, remove them, change them, and fix them to certain portions of matter, or even fix the spirits themselves, who directed these influences, to statues prepared by the rules of their magical art. They had mysterious methods of disentangling the soul from corporeal incumberments, and preparing it for every kind of supernatural illumination. The mind was composed for prophetick dreams, the eyes were strengthened for celestial visions. They received inspiration, and they contemplated the gods that gave it. How they understood this contemplation, how they saw the forms of god*, and how the presence of the gods was declared to them, might be explained, perhaps, in much as intelligible a manner as the presence of dæmons in their statues was explained. Suppose a wall

* Præsentiam sæpe divi suam declarant. Sæpe visæ formæ deorum. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

of

of looking glass, and so disposed at the same time as to occasion an echo*. Your figure and your voice too will be reflected from it, and you will be, in some sense, in that wall. I hurry over all these impertinencies, and I conclude by saying, that from this conspiracy of philosophy and theology, in the establishment of theurgic and natural magic, have proceeded all the folly and knavery of judicial astrology, of horoscopes, of spells, of charms, of talismans, of wizards, of witches, and of rosycrucians, and all the enthusiasm, blasphemy, and superstition that have accompanied these excommunicated persons and things, and that might have been reproached with great reason, upon many occasions, to the orthodox persons themselves who excommunicated both. I say might have been reproached, and I say it with reason; since many of the opinions which these orthodox persons hold, or have held, may be traced up through the same schools, through which the greatest extravagancies of astrologers, magicians, and rosycrucians have descended to these days. But we must not stop here. We must pursue the propagation of errour in higher instances than these, and in such as prevail under some form or other even at this day, even among men the most enlightened in our enlightened age.

Pagan theists, who deemed it too great presumption to worship the Supreme Being, might well

* Mars. Ficin.

have

have thought it still more presumptuous to dogmatise about his nature and attributes: and since they held the unity of the First Cause of all things, they should have seen the absurdity and inconsistency of analysing this monad into several principles, and of assuming other supercelestial and superessential beings. All this was done however; the absurdity was put in practice, and the inconsistency was admitted into the First Philosophy. Reason was overborne in this case by affections and passions, as reason is in almost every case where that rational animal man is to decide; and excessive curiosity and excessive vanity prevailed against the plainest dictates of common sense. God has proportioned, in every respect, our means of knowledge to our station here, and to our real wants in it. The bodies, that surround us operate continually on us: and their operations concern not only our well or ill being, but our very being. We are fitted therefore to acquire, by the help of our senses properly employed, by experiment and industry, such a degree of human knowledge about them, as is sufficient for the necessary uses of human life, and no more. In like manner, the knowledge of the Creator is on many accounts necessary to such a creature as man: and therefore we are made able to arrive, by a proper exercise of our mental faculties, from a knowledge of God's works to a knowledge of his existence, and of that infinite power and wisdom which are demonstrated to us

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in them. Our knowledge concerning God goes no further. We are in absolute ignorance of the real essence and inward constitution of every sensible object. How much less reason is there to expect any knowledge of the manner of being, and of the nature and essence of the invisible God, or of his physical and moral attributes, beyond that which his works, the effects of his nature and attributes, communicate to us! This degree, this sufficient degree of knowledge concerning God is a fixed point, on one side of which lies atheism, and metaphysical and theological blasphemy too often on the other.

Notwithstanding this which has been said, and which appears to be of the utmost evidence, philosophers have proceeded, without any regard to it, from the most early ages: and the whole sum of theology has been in every age a confused rhapsody of discordant, fluctuating hypotheses. The science to which they pretended was unattainable. Their doctrines, therefore, though dogmatically taught, and implicitly received in their several schools, were nothing more than arbitrary hypotheses: and hypotheses being so extravagantly prolific, that one often engenders twenty, it is no wonder that the confusion increased; that the more these doctrines were explained the darker they grew; and that the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians were, if possible, less intelligible than their masters, and all those who had gone before them. I mention these particularly, because they were the great theological

ological doctors of Greece, and the great channels through which all the metaphysical jargon, and all the superstitious opinions of ancient nations, have come down to us, intermingled with some scraps of good sense and of true theism. Plutarch says, there was nothing unreasonable, fabulous, nor superstitious in the sacred institutions of the Egyptians, from whose schools we know that Pythagoras and Plato derived their theology. But, on the contrary, he says, that all of them had moral and useful causes, and historical and philosophical meanings. But the priest made his court, at the expense of truth, to the priestess, to whom he addressed his treatise concerning Isis and Osiris; and we shall do better to give credit, on this occasion, to Dionysius Halicarnassensis*, who confesses, that although many of the Greek fables showed the operations of nature by allegories, and were composed for consolation under the calamities of life, for taking away perturbations of mind, for removing false opinions, and for other very good and commendable purposes, yet they are to be condemned in general, many as impious, all as pernicious; and he praises Romulus for admitting none of them.

SECT. VII.

It may be worth while to give two instances of the extravagant hypotheses which philosophy and theology conspired to frame, as soon, perhaps,

* Ant. Rom. l. 2.

as

as men began to turn their thoughts to these subjects; for we find ditheism and tritheism established in the most early ages, concerning which we have any anecdotes.

They who believed a selfexistent Being, the first intelligent Cause of all things, must have believed this Being to be all perfect. But then, as they modelled his government on a human plan, so they conceived his perfections, moral as well as physical, by human ideas; though they did not presume to limit the former by the latter. Thus, God was said to be the first good; but then the general notion, or the abstract idea, as some philosophers would call it, of this good, was not only taken from human goodness, but was considered too with little or no other relation than to man, that excellent creature, the very image of his Maker, and one half of whom, at least, was divine. A question arose, therefore, on these hypotheses. How could evil come into a system, of which God was the author, and man the final cause? This question made a further hypothesis necessary. It was "dignus vindice "nodus:" and another First God, another coeternal and coequal principle was introduced to solve a first cause of all evil, as the other was of all good. The contest between these independent and rival powers began by a struggle, some have said by a battle, when one of them endeavoured to reduce matter, which these philosophers held to be a third principal, though not a third God, into an orderly uniform frame and regular

regular motion, and when the other endeavoured to maintain disorder, deformity, irregularity, and to spoil, at least, the great design. The same contest was supposed to continue in the government that commenced at the formation of the world, and physical or moral good and evil to be produced, as one or other of these gods prevailed.

Plutarch*, who was a zealous assertor of this doctrine himself, asserted it to have been likewise that of the magians, the Chaldeans, the Egyptians, and of every philosopher almost of any note among the Greeks, from Pythagoras down to Plato. He represents it as an opinion settled in the minds of men by the authority of legislators and divines, of philosophers and poets, and not only as an opinion, but as an article of faith, on which sacrifices and religious rites were established. But every man has some favourite folly, and this was his. Bayle himself is forced to confess, that the representation is exaggerated. How, indeed, is it possible to believe, that such numbers of reasonable men could concur, from age to age, in so great an absurdity? Some of them might, and it is probable that they did, hold an opinion very near akin to this, and derived from it, but not the same that Plutarch held, and the Marcionites and Manichæans after him. This hypothesis was mitigated by another; and instead of a God unproduced and selfexist-

* Lib. de Iside et Osiride.

ent,

tent, an inferior being, produced and dependent, was assumed to be the author of evil. The preceptor of Trajan could not help admitting, most inconsistently with himself, that the two principles were not of equal force, and that the good principle was prevalent: but even further, that Zoroaster, and by consequence the magi, called the good principle alone God, and the evil principle a dæmon. This mitigated hypothesis was adopted by orthodox Christians, as the other was by heretics, and has, therefore, supported itself longer than the other: though the other spread more among Christians, from the third century, and before Manes, down to the seventh and even to the ninth, than it had ever spread and prevailed in the pagan world. But whatever success these hypotheses have had, when we consider even, that which I have called mitigated, as a pagan dogma, we must say, that although it does not imply contradiction so manifestly as the other, yet it implies it as strongly, and is still more injurious to the Supreme Being. It implies it as strongly; for to affirm that there are two selfexistent gods, independent and coequal, who made and governed the world, is not a jot more absurd, than it is to affirm that a God sovereignly good, and at the same time almighty and allwise, suffers an inferior dependent being to deface his work in any sort, and to make his other creatures both criminal and miserable. It is still more injurious to the Supreme Being; for if we had been to reason with pagan ditheists on their own no-

tions, we might have insisted, that it is no disgrace to a prince to reign according to the constitution of his country jointly with another, as the ephori reigned at Sparta, and the consuls governed at Rome, and that the ill government of his partner reflects no dishonour on him. But that to say of a monarch, in the true sense of the word, who is invested with absolute power, that he suffers one of his subjects to abuse the rest without control, and to draw them into crimes and revolts, for which he punishes them afterwards, is the most injurious accusation that can be brought. The heathen theists of common sense reasoned in this manner we cannot doubt, and that they did so I find a remarkable proof, though a negative one, and brought for another purpose, in the intellectual system. Celsus objected to the Christians that they believed a certain adversary to God, the devil, called in Hebrew Satan; and that they affirmed impiously, that the greatest God was disabled from doing good, or withstood in doing it, by this adversary. Now Celsus, who made this objection to the Christians, would not have made it, I think, if he himself had held the mitigated ditheism we have mentioned, whether he held the other or no.

Let us speak of tritheism, the other instance proposed to show how natural theology was rendered a confused heap of absurd and inconsistent hypotheses, by men who presumed to dogmatise beyond the bounds of human knowledge.

Dr. Cudworth could not well conceive, no more

more than la Mothe le Vayer, how a trinity of divine hypostases should be first discovered merely by human wit and reason. He would have it believed, therefore, a revelation to the Jews, and a tradition derived from them. But he supports his suggestion ill. That the Samothracians held a certain trinity of gods, which they called by a Hebrew name Cabbirim, or the mighty gods, and that there are in the books of the Old Testament certain significations of a plurality in the Deity, are allegations so vague and inconclusive, that they prove nothing, or might be turned to prove what the learned author would have disliked very much; to prove it ill perhaps, but as well, at least, as they prove his suggestion. The other proof he brings may be equivocal as well as weak in the manner in which it is expressed. He quotes Proclus for saying, that the trinity contained in the Chaldaic oracles was at first a theology of divine tradition, or a revelation, or a divine cabala, and he quotes the Greek of Proclus, after which he adds, viz. among the Hebrews first, and from them afterward communicated to the Egyptians and other nations. If Proclus now had said all this in terms, or had spoke to the effect of the additional words, which I am unable to determine, not having the book at this time in my power, the proof would have been no better than either of the former. But if the additional words are not of Proclus, but of the doctor, the doctor seeming to quote Proclus, quotes himself, in respect to the point he was con-

cerned to secure, that this divine revelation could be made to no other nation, if it was made, than to the Hebrews.

I proceed now to say, that it is not so hard to conceive how human wit and reason might, and why philosophers did, invent the hypothesis of a trinity, without any obligations to the Jews, who, from their Exode to their return from their seventy years captivity, and from thence till all their books were written or reduced into a canon, borrowed much more than they lent.

The confusion and obscurity of the First Philosophy, as it was taught in the antiquity to which we look up in this discourse, was in no part greater than in this of the trinity. They who have pretended to explain it, to improve it, and to build upon it, have only perplexed it the more: some because they were as chimerical as the first inventors, and others because they had some particular purpose to serve. What is unintelligible in Plato, for instance, or in the fragments that we have of Pythagorean doctrines, you will not perceive to grow more intelligible when you have consulted Jamblicus, Porphyry, Plotinus, any of the philosophers of these sects, or any of the Christian fathers, who sanctified a great deal of this heathen lore. Marsilius Ficinus, and the whole crowd of modern translators, commentators, and collectors, will help you as little. Even Cudworth, the best of them, leaves you where he found you, and gives you little else than a nonsensical paraphrase of nonsense. It was not

not his fault. The good man passed his life in the study of an unmeaning jargon: and as he learned he taught.

If he had not been fond of giving a divine original to a doctrine that became a fundamental article of christianity, he might have deduced the original of this very human hypothesis, for such it was in the pagan world, from what he had asserted and proved already. He had shown how poets and philosophers promoted polytheism by allegorising corporeal nature. Was it hard then to imagine, that they allegorised incorporeal nature likewise? They deified sensible, why should they not deify intellectual objects? They increased the number of their gods, by deifying even mixed modes and relations. Why should they not do the same, by making ideal substances of the wisdom and power of God, and of that divine spirit which they imagined to pervade all things? There was no need of inspiration, nor any extraordinary communication, to prompt them to do so: and it would have been matter of wonder, if the whole system of nature had not been reduced, as it was, into one body of corrupt theology, by the Egyptians and the other nations of the East; and by the Greeks, who philosophised many centuries together on the same foolish principles.

The habitude of erecting extravagant hypotheses into doctrines of the first philosophy, and of founding natural theology on the most unnatural principles might seduce men easily into tritheism, without any such apparent reasons for it as

they had for ditheism. But if they thought themselves obliged to invent the latter in order to account for the existence of evil, they saw that there was a necessity for inventing the former, in order to give an appearance of consistency to the very best of their theistical systems. They had gods and demigods and dæmons enough. But none of them could be reputed first causes, or principles, and three such at least were necessary to be found.

When they had imagined a celestial, on the plan of a terrestrial monarchy, they found place, and rank, and business for all the imaginary beings that superstition had created: but they confined the monarch, like an eastern prince, to the inmost recesses of his palace, where they supposed him to remain immovable. They acknowledged him, very rationally, to be the source of all intelligence, and wisdom, and power, as well as the fountain of all existence, and the spring of all life and motion, throughout the whole extent of being. But then they imagined, very irrationally, that this unity was such an immovable essence as could not have acted in the formation, and as did not act in the preservation and government of the world. They raised their notions of the Divine Majesty so high; or, to speak more properly, they refined so metaphysically upon them, for they cannot be even raised too high, when they are kept within the bounds of our real ideas, that they placed the Supreme God not only far out of the sight of human intel-

lect,

lect, but even out of the reach, if I may say so, of that system whereof they confessed him to be the first cause. There were, indeed, according to them, inferior generated gods, participant in some sort of his wisdom, and delegates in some degree of his power; but this participation and this delegation were not sufficient: and to make such a system as that of the universe, the very wisdom and the very power of the Supreme self-existent Being were necessary. No cause out of the Deity could produce such effects, and all other beings, with participated wisdom and delegated power, would be but second causes at best, acting indeed, but acted upon, without any adequate efficacy of their own.

We may very well believe, that some such considerations as these determined the most ancient philosophers to assume a trinity of divine hypostases in the Godhead. A second, proceeding eternally from the first, and a third, proceeding eternally from the second, or from the first and the second. Subsistencies, beings not independent, like the good and the evil god, but distinct. Subordinate, but subordinate within the Deity, and far above the highest order of generated gods. It is probable, that neither Zoroaster, nor the magi, nor Mercury Trismegist, nor the Egyptian divines, were as ingenious to abstract and distinguish, and to invent new words, as the Nicæan fathers, or the latter Pythagoricians and Platonicians. They might content themselves with establishing the general differences I have mentioned

between these three, and all their other gods. Cudworth says, that they understood by this trinity the Godhead: and I remember to have read somewhere, in Plotinus perhaps, or in some other madman of that stamp, that there are emanations within the Deity, as well as emanations that go out of it. The second of these gods, then, was the divine intellect personified, an emanation that did not emane, if you allow the term, out of the Deity. The third was the Divine Spirit, another emanation that did not emane neither. Thus the difficulties, that embarrassed these great divines, might seem to be taken away; for though the immovable essence of the unity could not move, nor act, nor pervade, and become the soul of the world immediately, yet all this might be done by the second and third persons of the Godhead, who exerted all the energy of the first.

That such an hypothesis was established among the most ancient of the heathen divines cannot be doubted, though their doctrines are come to us in broken scraps, very imperfectly, and therefore very darkly. This imperfect and general knowledge is enough however to satisfy any reasonable curiosity, and it leaves room enough for great scholars to dispute and wrangle about particulars. Let us leave that part to them, and pursue reflections of another kind.

Some, and I think very few, of the Greek philosophers were rank atheists. Diagoras was one; and, if it be true that Democritus bought and instructed

instructed him, he might pass easily from the absurdity of believing, that the visible species of things and the ideas we receive from them are gods, to that of believing that there is no god. Theodorus was another: and he was so zealous in his atheism, that he wrote several books to maintain it. Strato was not quite so positive in the denial of any Supreme Being; but he was very positive, that he had no need of assuming any to account for the making of the world. He went through all the parts of it, and pretended to show, that all of them were effects of natural causes, of matter and motion. "Naturalibus fieri aut factum "esse dicit ponderibus et motibus," says Tully*. Epicurus acknowledged gods, but gods so extremely ridiculous, that he was guilty of something worse than atheism, while he affected theism, "invidiæ detestandæ causâ," says the same Tully.

Such philosophers as these imagined a sort of plastic nature, working blindly but necessarily, and requiring no superior principal to direct her action. The greatest part of the ancient naturalists thought very differently from these. They established a material, and an efficient, intelligent cause of all the phænomena. Though all of them believed matter eternal, they had various opinions about the material cause. It was to some an assemblage of all the elements massed, and confounded, and fermenting together, "rudis in-

* Acad. Quæs. l. 4.

"digestaque

"digestaque moles." To others it was some one select element; to Thales, water, or perhaps a fluid chaos; to Anaximenes, air; to Archelaus, air condensed into water, the principle of Thales; or rarified into æther, the fiery principle of the Stoics. Their notions of the efficient intelligent cause were not more uniform than these: but as these were different manners of conceiving the same thing, so were the others. The material cause, under every notion of it, was matter still; the efficient cause, under every notion of it, was intelligence still: and all the notions of this kind, which theistical philosophers entertained, were less repugnant, if I am not much deceived, than it is commonly thought. It seems to me, that the differences between them were more apparent than real, and that they arose chiefly from different applications of the same trinitarian hypothesis. On this foundation, much of what has passed for atheism may be explained easily into theism. I could carry instances of my charity a great way up on this occasion, to the Ionic philosophers, Anaximenes and Archelaus, for instance, if not to Anaximander; and if Thales, the founder of this school, wants little, Anaxagoras, the last but one of his successors, wants no excuse to clear him of atheism.

The hypothesis of a trinity in the godhead was brought from Egypt into Greece by Orpheus, whoever he was, and possibly by others in that remote antiquity. It is not unlikely too, that this doctrine being taught to a half savage people,

ple, who were unable to distinguish between gods in the godhead and gods out of it, if in truth that distinction was made so early, increased and confirmed their polytheism. But the true philosophical age having begun much later in that country, when the Greeks, instead of waiting for missionaries from Egypt, went thither themselves in quest of science, this hypothesis could be little known, and less employed before that æra; whereas it was much in use afterward, and we find the traces of it in all that theistical philosophers taught. These traces are obscure and confused. The doctrine itself was so, till Plato appeared like the pagan Athanasius, defined the mystery, and fixed a profession of faith, that lasted till the christian Athanasius altered it. Thus we may account, in part, for the obscurity and confusion wherein we discover the traces of this doctrine. It was very obscure and confused in the minds of the philosophers themselves. No wonder then if the references to it, and the opinions derived from it, are still more so in the writings of men who have conveyed them down to us in fragments, and who understood the doctrine even less than these philosophers*.

Tully

* We shall have no room to be surprised, that the pagan doctrine of a trinity in the godhead was taught, and has come down to us so confusedly; if we consider how confusedly and how darkly the fathers of the three first centuries expressed themselves on the same subject: though the learned bishop Bull would have made, if he could, these primitive fathers all

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Tully makes Velleius say, that Thales was the first who inquired into such matters; that he asserted

"ad unum" Athanasians, and the doctrine of the church to have been exactly that of the Nicæan council, long before Athanasius was born, or the council was held. If this doctrine has come down to us with greater precision than that of the heathen philosophers, and in a uniformity of terms, the reason is obvious. Ancient theists applied their unsettled notions of this kind differently, and according to their different systems of philosophy. They were under no common control, to enforce a uniformity of terms at least: whereas among Christians there was such a control, and men were obliged to use the same forms of words, whatever their opinions were. Their leaders indeed disputed much, and each of them formed a party: but when they met in councils, they were obliged, sometimes by art or intrigue, and sometimes by the determining influence of imperial authority, to unite in terms, and to create an appearance of uniformity. Thus the christian doctrine of the trinity was fixed. Different councils, it is true, made different decisions, and reverend fathers, who had held one opinion in one council, changed it in another; there were therefore several orthodoxies "pro tempore," if I may say so. But that which prevailed last has come down to us; and nothing has been neglected, not even interpolation, to make more ancient fathers hold the language of those who were more modern; an example of which I will quote from Erasmus[a]. That learned, exact, and candid divine, not only acknowledges in many places, among a multitude of other defects, such as unfairness, uncharitableness, and violence, the inaccuracy of these fathers in their writings; but he complains likewise of the interpolations and alterations, which have been made in them for the purpose I have mentioned. St. Hilary, for instance, who spoke sometimes of the Son of God, as of a God of the

[a] Ep. in Hilarium,

same

serted water to be the first principle of things, and God the mind who framed them all out of

same kind, or of the same nature with his Father, which expressions however do not come up to a complete notion of consubstantiality, dared not call the Holy Ghost God, nor ascribe adoration to him; either because he is not called God expressly in Scripture, or because the saint thought it more necessary to insist on the godhead of the Son, whose human nature made it more difficult to persuade mankind that he was God; or else, finally, because the claim of the Holy Ghost had not been yet admitted in due form by councils, who erected themselves, as it were, into courts of honour to settle ranks and precedency in Heaven. Erasmus thinks, that such reasons as these obliged Hilarius to use much caution in his expressions, and therefore, speaking of the Holy Ghost, he had contented himself to say, "promerendus est:" but some orthodox interpolator added, "et adorandus." Many other instances of corrupting the text of this writer there are, and those principally where such liberties ought to have been taken the least, as in his books "de Trinitate," and "de Synodis;" for in them, says Erasmus, he treated very difficult and very dangerous points of divinity, "periculosæ de rebus divinis difficultates."

The same artifice was employed sometimes in favour of opinions reputed heterodox, if we may believe Rufinus, who, in defending Origen against that bully Jerom, and that ideot Epiphanius, insists, that Origen would not have been exposed to their censure, if his writings had not been interpolated. But this artifice, as well as others, had a much greater, and an entire effect, when it was employed on the side of the orthodox, that is of the majority, or of those who made themselves pass for the majority. Thus it happened, in the case of the trinity, and in many others, that christian doctrines have been handed down with an appearance of uniformity, which pagan doctrines could not have.

But farther, if christian doctrines had come down, in the writings of the most ancient fathers, with still less uniformity than

water*. Diogenes Laertius says, that Thales held God to be the oldest of all things that exist, because

than they have, such modern fathers as bishop Bull, would not have found it hard, to make them appear entirely uniform. This he has attempted, in the case of the trinity, with great applause from the ecclesiastics of your church, and from those of ours. He owns, for instance, that Origen talks sometimes too freely and sceptically; that Tertullian cared little what he said, provided he contradicted his adversary; and that two eggs are not more alike, than the expressions of this father to the whimsies of Valentinian. He gives us Lactanctius for a rhetor ignorant in theology, and St. Jerom for a sophist not to be relied on much. Many of their expressions being gnostical and Arian, as well as those of other fathers, they were not much in his favour; and yet to save them for other purposes wherein their authority might be necessary, he distinguishes between witnesses of the faith, and interpreters of the Scriptures. He allows them to be good witnesses, and condemns them often as bad interpreters. He makes this distinction particularly when he speaks of a passage in Irenæus, where this father cites a passage from the prophet Isaiah, to prove the divinity of the Holy Ghost. Bull thought Origen orthodox in his opinion, though not in his expressions, concerning the trinity. Few of the fathers who lived before the Nicean council were so; and therefore Bull supposes them orthodox against their expressions, rather than proves them to have been so by their expressions. He does by them what they did by the Scriptures, and draws them to his sense, in what terms soever they signify their own. Cudworth thinks these primitive fathers heterodox in opinion, as well as in expression. They must needs have been much in the wrong, since they agreed in asserting the subordination of the son to the father. They had

* Thales, qui primus de talibus rebus quæsivit, aquam dixit esse initium rerum: Deum autem eam mentem, quæ ex aquâ cuncta fingeret. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

cause ungenerated or unproduced; and the world to be the most beautiful, because it was made by God.

had taken this opinion of the logos from the Platonic philosophy, and their whole trinity was built on the plan which Plato had made less confused than that of other heathen trinitarians. "Usque ad tres hypostases, dicit Plato, Dei progredi essentiam; et esse quidem, dicit, Deum summe bonum, post illum autem secundum conditorem, tertium autem mundi animam."

The absurdities and profanations built on such notions as these, were innumerable. He who endeavours to consider them with attention, will find his head turn in the confusion they create, and no precise discrimination of orthodox and heterodox possible to be made between them, either according to reason, wherein they have no foundation at all, or to Gospel revelation, wherein they have very little. They were, however, propagated by Pagan and Christian theology, till metaphorical generations were thought to be real, and till the virtues and operations of the one Supreme Being were assumed to be *distinct* hypostases or subsistencies in the divinity; as the æons of Valentinian signified, I presume, no more, in the allegorical cant of the first Christian times, than virtues and affections of the divinity, which were afterward understood to be real beings existing out of the first Being.

These doctrines were encouraged, perhaps introduced by others, that traditional theology among the heathens, and cabalistical literature among the Jews, had preserved from the most ancient ages; and which, as wild as they were, had wanted neither knaves nor fools to vouch for them. These were such as supposed frequent manifestations of the Supreme Being to his creatures. According to these, he manifested himself sometimes under the form of an angel; sometimes a little, and but a little differently, under that of a man; both of which were called God, while the manifestation lasted. That this was so, we may conclude from divers passages of the Old Testament, and from several Egyptian traditions. Thus

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God*. These expressions might induce one to think, that Thales was not only the oldest, but the most orthodox, of the Greek philosophers, even more so than the divine Plato; and that his doctrine may serve as an instance to confirm Tertullian's maxim, how precarious soever it be, "id "verum quod primum." They might induce one to think, that Thales intended the Supreme Being, whose sole action in the production of things other theists did not acknowledge; though they acknowledged his existence. But these passages, compared with others, will rather serve to show in how confused a manner the trinitarian hypothesis led these philosophers to speak of God, and of the first efficient cause. Bayle thought the text of Tully corrupted in the passage concern-

it became in time not hard to imagine a much more noble manifestation of the Supreme Being himself, in the appearance of the logos, or the word, under a human form, into which God had insinuated himself, and in which he remained incarnated. "Pater in me manens facit ipse opera." The word, that is the supreme reason, was always with God, for God alone is that supreme reason: but this reason spoke to mankind under the sensible image of a man, when that person appeared who was called the Son of God, on account of his miraculous birth, and most important mission. Such was the word of St. John; "the visible image of the invisible God." To this let us add, for the honour of humanity, and on the authority of Scripture, that angels suffered themselves to be adored by men before this manifestation; but that they have declined this honour ever since the Son of God took upon him the human nature.

* Antiquissimum eorum omnium quæ sunt, Deus; ingenitus enim. Pulcherrimum mundus; à Deo enim factus est.

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ing Thales, because Velleius having said that this philosopher was the first, says immediately after, that Anaxagoras* was the first who taught this doctrine. There may be room for such a suspicion, and whatever interpretation be given to the passage, it will be little agreeable to the usual clearness and precision of that great author.

When we consider that Thales had been instructed in the Egyptian schools, and reflect on the opinion imputed to him by Stobæus, that the first cause had no action, we must be persuaded, that however he spoke of mind, he did not intend the first God in the Heathen trinity. He seems rather to have confounded Nous and Psyche, mind and soul, the second and the third god. A passage in Diogenes Laertius is very favourable to this notion, for, in that, Thales is said to have held, that mind, and therefore the efficient cause which had made all things out of water, was the swiftest of things, and pervaded rapidly the universe†. None of these philosophers presumed to employ the first God as the immediate active efficient cause of things. They introduced therefore into their physiological theology the second and the third gods of the Zoroastrian and Orphic trinity, whom they sometimes seem to distinguish, and whom they much oftener confound.

* Anaxagoras, qui accepit ab Anakimene disciplinam, primus omnium rerum descriptionem et modum mentis infinitæ vi ac ratione designari, et confici voluit.

† Velocissimum, mens; nam per universa discurrit.

in it and by it, by greater authorities than you apprehend, perhaps. He might soon reconcile his opinions to those of some Christian philosophers, and shelter himself behind their orthodoxy. There are those who ascribe as much to this active, luminous, fiery æther, as Zeno did; and since he thought it, or rather called it, God, because of the divine spirit, whose vehicle it was, they would soon persuade him to admit, that this divine is an incorporeal spirit, without whose immediate action upon æther, even æther itself would be incapable of producing any one of the phænomena, and not the least operation could be performed in the whole extent of physical nature. They would persuade him to it the sooner, because, by rejecting all existence beside spirit and idea, and by making his doctrines coincide with theirs in the whole, he would deliver himself from a most absurd inconsistency, or from the trouble of defending it. I find, in one of the finest letters of Seneca*, whose authority concerning the tenets of Zeno, the founder of the sect he had embraced, is decisive, that this philosopher denied the existence of a material world, and by consequence, one would think, of his favourite æther. Parmenides asserted one sole substance, like Spinoza. Zeno denied even this, says Seneca†. He could not believe his God, therefore, to be so much as clothed with æther, unless he contradicted himself:

* Ep. 88.

† ——Parmenidi, nihil est præter unum—Zenoni ne unum quidem.

self: but by taking refuge among these philosophers, he might talk as if he did; he might maintain that he was so clothed, and might assume the right they assume, to talk most learnedly of all the corporal phænomena, without believing that they exist; in short, he might reduce inconsistency itself into system. Seneca, and the whole portic, might cry out, that too much subtilty does great hurt, and is injurious to truth*. They would cry out in vain.

Having observed how Thales, Pythagoras, and Zeno, founders of three famous sects, reasoned about the first principles of things, I come to speak of Anaxagoras. Now this philosopher, like the rest, held matter to be eternal. But he differed from them in his notions concerning the efficient cause. He did not make a plastic intelligent nature of mind and spirit, confounded into one. He did not make the same of spirit alone, as he might have done, since this spirit being divine, and even a third God, according to ancient traditions, could want no intelligence. He did not mingle up both or either of these with matter, to constitute a soul of the world. He advanced a much more rational hypothesis than any of those who went before, or who came after him. Diogenes Laertius has preserved the summary of it in his own words. He was the first, says this biographer, who added mind to

* Quantum mali faciat nimia subtilitas, et quàm infesta veritati sit! Ib.

matter; that is, he added it in a manner that neither Thales nor any of the Greek philosophers had imagined before him; for he writes thus in the beginning of his work, all things were blended together, when mind came, and put them into order*. "Accessit mens." Mind then was no part of them, no plastic nature working in them. Mind, the first efficient cause, was distinct from them, and extrinsical to them. I determine not, whether Anaxagoras meaned by mind the Supreme Being in his unity, without any regard to the hypothesis of a trinity, or whether he assumed distinctly the second God of this trinity, while others assumed the third only, or confounded the second with the third in their notions of a first efficient cause. In all cases he was a more reasonable theist, and especially if he ascribed the production, order, and government of the universe to the one, whom others considered only as the first God, which I incline to think was his meaning.

But to what purpose do I comment on this passage, when the doctrine of Anaxagoras concerning a first efficient cause is so fully mentioned by Aristotle and Plutarch? The former of these was much more inclined to censure, than to approve the opinions of other philosophers: and yet Anaxagoras extorted his approbation, on this occasion

* Primus hic materiæ mentem adjecit, in principio operis —sic scribens, omnia simul erant, deinde accessit mens, eaque composuit.

casion at least, how much soever their opinions might differ on others. He who taught, that mind or intellect was the efficient cause of the world, and of all order in it, appeared like a man of good sense, "quasi sobrius," in comparison with the former naturalists, who were a set of vain babblers, "vana dicentes," says Aristotle*: and he adds, we know that this man was Anaxagoras. The same philosopher, in another place†, lets us farther into this doctrine; for he says there, that, according to it, this mind, the first principle or efficient cause, was simple and unmixed, and that Anaxagoras ascribed to it both knowledge and the beginning of motion‡. Plutarch goes farther§, for he contrasts the doctrine of Anaxagoras, who held that matter was motionless till God gave it motion as well as order, with that of Plato, who held that matter was in a disorderly motion, and that God did nothing more than direct this motion, so as to bring order out of confusion. This is the substance of the passage: and surely the Ionic philosopher came nearer to orthodoxy in this case than the divine Plato, though such a Platonic madman as poor Dacier may not scruple to assert, and to believe piously, that, according

* Arist. Metaph. l. 1.

† Arist. de Anima, l. 1.

‡ ——Simplicem, et non mistam, et puram esse, sinceramque dixit. Atque eidem principio hæc utraque tribuit, cognitionem—et motum, dicens, universum mentem movisse.

§ Plut. de Placit. Phil. l. 1, c. 7.

to Plato, motion was imprinted on matter by the same spirit who created matter*.

It was objected to Anaxagoras, by Aristotle, and by several Christian writers, that, although he acknowledged a supreme mind to be the efficient cause of all things, yet he had never recourse to it when he could account for the phænomena without it. That he used the divine intellect as a machine to remove difficulties, otherwise insuperable, out of the way†; but in every other case, he chose rather to insist on natural causes‡, than to argue from the principles of mind and reason §. All this now means no more, than that he neither mingled logick, like Aristotle, nor theology, like Plato, with his physicks: and the objection is not only absurd in itself, but so much the more so, because the methods of inquiring into nature, implied in it and opposed to that of Anaxagoras, are infinitely absurd. I acknowledge, might Anaxagoras say, a supreme mind, that disposed and ordered the whole frame of the universe, that gave it motion, and set the great machine a going under the influence and direction of second causes, which proceed and work effects according to the original impressions that divine wisdom and power made uniformly on all

* Il a été imprimé a la matière par le même esprit qui la creé. La doctrine de Platon.

† ——Tanquam machinâ utitur intellectu, &c. Arist.

‡ ——Magis cætera omnia, quam intellectum, causam eorum quæ fiunt ponit. Arist.

§ ——Ex mentis rationisque regulâ. Eusch.

matter,

matter, or differently on the different elements of it. These original impressions, which proceed from the inconceivable energy of the first efficient cause, and this order of second causes, which proceeds from them, I call laws of nature. Knowledge of the first is wholly unattainable: I presume, therefore, to speak seldom of it, and always hypothetically. Knowledge of the second may be attained in some degree by observation and experiment, and by no other means. By these we may rise a little way from particular to general and more general causes, and within these bounds I confine my physical researches.

If Anaxagoras held this discourse, whatever cavils might be made by atomic or other philosophers to some of the terms he employed, we should be obliged to confess, that he talked very rationally. Logick came into mode after his time; but *logick*, to speak like my lord Bacon, cannot reach the subtilty of nature, and, by catching at what it cannot hold, serves rather to establish and fix errour, than to open the way to truth. I may say too, after men of the greatest name in philosophy, what it would become me ill to pronounce on my own authority, that Aristotle rendered himself as ridiculous by applying logick to natural philosophy, as Descartes rendered himself estimable by the application of geometry to it. As to theology, they who abuse it by mixing it with physicks, any further than Anaxagoras did, degrade the Supreme Being in their ideas, and lead men back towards polytheism, or to something very

very like it at least. Which is the less pardonable, because it is done wantonly, as it were, and without any apparent motive but impertinent curiosity, or as impertinent vanity. They are unable to conceive how body can act at all, and therefore they suppose the immediate presence and action of an incorporeal agent in every operation of corporeal nature. But to what purpose? Æther, it is said, that pure invisible active fire, permeates the hardest bodies, or gravitation or attraction intercedes all body, even the "minima naturæ." Is not this now to ascend high enough in the series of second causes? Or, if we cannot conceive how æther performs of itself, and without any concurrent cause, the operations, and produces the effects which chemists ascribe to it, do we hope to discover how mind acts on æther, or concurrently with it? Will any man, who is in his senses, expect to discover what those original impressions are, or how they were given by the supreme mind, which determine æther in this manner, and make it the sensible cause of these effects? I think not. They who believe, that the Newtonian attraction is no original nor universal property of matter, will do extremely well to attempt the improvement of this system, by discovering the physical or metaphysical cause of it. They who believe it such a property will inquire no farther, nor agitate their minds, nor beat their brains, to discover the cause, and in hope to determine how this property was impressed originally on matter. A Leibnitzian,

zian, who does not believe any such original universal property, nor any thing more than a new phænomenon to have been discovered, should consequentially attempt the improvement I have just mentioned. But I think he would rather attempt to demolish by logick, what has been erected on experiment or geometry, without being able to substitute any thing so good in the room of it. He would require of the Newtonian, to give him the sufficient reason of such a property in matter. He would retire from the visible corporeal world to the intellectual world of ideas, and endeavour to make the inquiry, that he could carry on no farther in physicks, end in metaphysics. The Newtonian, if he was wise, would refuse to follow him, lest the inquiry should end, after much labour of abstract meditation, as oddly as that of Leibnitz did, when he could find the sufficient reason of extension in nothing better than nonextended substances, in those simple beings his monades.

As it is unreasonable to indulge the foolish desire of knowing, or the impertinent desire of appearing to know, beyond the reach and comprehension of our very limited faculties in all cases, so it is particularly both profane and injurious to true theism, to assume the immediate presence and action of the Supreme Being in all the operations of corporeal nature; however the assumption may be palliated by metaphysical distinctions, and how innocent soever the intentions of those who make it may be. They who do this,

do in effect reduce God in their ideas, notwithstanding all the magnificent expressions which they employ, to be a sort of plastic intelligent nature working constantly on matter, if not in it. The notion is much the same with that which the Pagans entertained: it is only less reverential to the Supreme Being than theirs was. They gave this employment to a third God, who was in that hypothesis the second link in that chain of being that reached down from God to man. These Christian philosophers and divines give it to the Supreme Being himself; for they profess that they adore this Being in his unity, and have no other God but him. We are forced to help our conceptions of the divine nature by images taken from human nature, and the imperfections of this nature are our excuse. But then we must take care not to make humanity the measure of divinity, and much more not to make the last the least of the two. When we have raised our idea of any human excellency as high as we are able, it remains a very limited idea. When we apply it to God, we must add to it therefore our negative idea, or our notion of infinity; that is, we must not confine it by the same, nor suppose it confined by any limitations whatever. Thus, when we speak of the world, the work of God, we must not conceive it to have been made by a laborious progression, and to have remained at last imperfect like the works of men. We must conceive, on the contrary, as well as we can, that God willed it to exist, and it existed; that he

wills

wills it to continue, and it continues distinct from the workman, like any human work, and infinitely better fitted, by the contrivance and disposition of it, to answer all the purposes of the divine architect, without his immediate and continual interposition. To think otherwise, is to measure divinity by a more scanty measure than humanity, and, because we cannot conceive how the operations of this vast machine are performed, to account for them by supposing it, in this instance, less perfect than a machine of human execution. Carry a clock to the wild inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope, they will soon be convinced that intelligence made it, and none but the most stupid will imagine, that this intelligence is in the hand that they see move, and in the wheels that they see turn. Those among them, who pretend to greater sagacity than the rest, may perhaps suspect, that the workman is concealed in the clock, and there conducts, invisibly, all the motions of it. The first of these Hottentot philosophers are, you see, more rational than atheists; the second are more so than the heathen naturalists, and the third are just at a pitch with some modern metaphysicians.

The same objection was pushed by Plato against Anaxagoras on this farther consideration, that, by insisting on second causes alone, he neglected the contemplation of final causes, and to "penetrate "the designs of that Supreme Spirit who governs "the world; while Socrates undertook to explain "all nature by the fitnesses and unfitnesses of "things,

"things, and rather to give men great views, "and to elevate their minds, than to instruct "them in natural philosophy*." I have touched this subject, I believe, already in part, and enough to show, after my lord Bacon, that the method Anaxagoras took, and our modern philosophers have pursued, with so much honour to themselves, and so much benefit to mankind, tended to the advancement of real knowledge; whereas the contrary method tended to obstruct, and did really obstruct it. But in this place, and without repeating what has been said before, I must examine the objection in another view, and show, by a comparison of the two methods, that Socrates and Plato, who were in all things the same, as Plutarch says †, substituted fantastic in lieu of real knowledge, and corrupted science to the very source; that of the first philosophy in a particular manner, and by such assumptions, and such a method of reasoning, as continue the taint to this day.

They discovered a first intelligent cause, as Anaxagoras hath done, "à posteriori," that is, by the only true way by which we are able to make this discovery. The reflections which Socrates made on the creatures, as we learn from Xenophon ‡, demonstrated to him, that the Creator of the world was not chance. It might have been expected from the character of So-

* Dacier on the doctrine of Plato.
† De Placit. Phil. ‡ De Memorab.

crates,

crates, that he would have confined his speculations to the same principles of reasoning, or have controlled them by it. But he did the contrary. Xenophon, who took minutes of his discourses, accused Plato of corrupting the doctrine of their common master; and Diogenes Laertius says, that Plato ascribed to him many things which he never taught. This writer quotes for it even the authority of Socrates himself; for he relates, that when this philosopher heard the Lysis read, he cried out, "O, Hercules! how many things does "this young man feign of me?" But notwithstanding these testimonies, and without entering into the quarrel between Xenophon and Plato, like Gellius, Athenæus, and others, it would be easy to prove, by several authorities, and even by that of Xenophon, that if Socrates did not say all that Plato made him say, yet he advanced many points of doctrine much more improper to be subjects of inquiry, than many which he forbid to be made such. In short, though he is said to have drawn philosophy from the clouds, and though he did, in fact, prefer the study of morality to that of physicks, yet he mounted to the clouds himself, and lost himself in them. How could he do otherwise? when he declared that the two offices of philosophy are the contemplation of God, and the abstraction of the soul from corporal sense*. Men who are presumptuous and mad enough to think themselves capable of such contemplation

* Stanley from Plato.

and

and such abstraction, may well begin their inquiries out of the bounds of human knowledge: and they who do so run a great risk of getting never into them. Such were these famous philosophers: and that you may the better comprehend their method, I choose to set it before you in the light in which it stands in the Phædo. You will see it there; and perhaps it is the only thing worth observing in the whole dialogue, with this advantage, that the method of reasoning "à "priori" is contrasted with that of reasoning "à posteriori."

In the account which Phædo gives of the discourse Socrates held immediately before his death, concerning the immortality of the soul, two objections that were made to him are mentioned. It was objected, that the soul, being nothing more than a kind of harmony resulting from the composition of the body, instead of lasting longer than the body, must decay with it, and even perish before it. In the next place, the soul having been compared to a tailor, who makes himself several suits of clothes, and wears them out one after another, the objector urges, that she may wear out herself at last by the fatigue of going through so many generations, and perish with one body, though she has outlived many. Such weighty objections threw the auditors, who had been convinced before by the no less weighty arguments of Socrates, into doubt and perplexity. Socrates felt none, as you will believe of course; and Phædo proceeds to relate how he continued the

the disputation; how he convinced Cebes, one of the objectors; and how he left Simonias, the other, without a reply. In order to do this the more effectually, he thinks it necessary to consider the causes of generation and corruption; and he says, on that occasion, that he had been desirous in his youth to study physicks, or the history of nature, as he calls this science. Now the more he studied nature, that he might discover the cause of generation and corruption, and the constitution of human bodies, the more blind and the more ignorant, it seems, he grew; and this we shall believe the more easily still, if we consider how superficially his scholar talks, and how grossly he blunders too, whenever he touches these subjects, which he affects to treat as matters of amusement rather than of serious application. Socrates became acquainted with second causes and effects in the course of this study; but he could go no higher, and he remained much dissatisfied with such imperfect knowledge. He was therefore extremely rejoiced when he fell by accident on the works of Anaxagoras; for that philosopher teaching that mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered, and was the cause of all things, he expected to find in those writings the sufficient reason of Leibnitz, not only how, but why this mind or intelligence had disposed and ordered every thing, why every thing is as it is through the whole extent of nature. But he was again wonderfully disappointed. Anaxagoras proceeded on observation and experiment, such as

he was able to make, to consider how second causes work in the corporeal system, and the production of the phænomena, under the direction, and by the energy of the first. But he presumed not to go up to the first, to discover how this direction was given, how this energy was communicated, nor, in a word, what the designs, the reasons, and the ends of the divine architect were. Socrates, therefore, who aimed at nothing less than knowledge of this kind, despised Anaxagoras; and considering what he had a mind to know, without any regard to the means he had of knowing, he despised physicks, and resorted to metaphysicks. There he and his scholars found the immaterial forms of things, eternal ideas, and incorporeal substances; by which, if you should ask me what I understand him to have meant, I should be obliged, in conscience, to answer you as honest Cebes answered Socrates, "per Jovem "haud multum." Whatever they are, they exist in the divine intellect. There we may, and there we ought to contemplate them; for the Logos, or second God in the Platonick trinity, was an assemblage, a congeries, as Cudworth calls him, of beings crowded into one, the place of ideas in the Platonism of Malbranche, and the same thing to the soul, as the soul is to the body; for so we must understand an expositor and translator of Plato, or deny him any meaning at all*.

If you would know how Socrates pursues his

* Dacier Arg. du Phædon.

sublime

sublime metaphysical method of investigating nature, you may please to imagine Anaxagoras and him in your garden, and yourself sauntering between them. You admire the beauty and smell of one of your flowers, and you ask the philosophers what makes it so fine and so sweet? The first talks to you of the figure of the flower, of the variety of colours which set off one another, and the several tints which run into one another, and beget a pleasing confusion. He talks to you of the different strainers through which the sap is filtered, and of the great alterations that he has observed to be wrought to the taste, as well as to the sight and smell in fruits, as well as flowers, by this operation of nature. But he owns very frankly, that his knowledge extends no further, and that he cannot so much as guess at the inward constitutions, and the real essences of substances. Socrates asks Anaxagoras whether his senses do not deceive him, when they give him ideas that are not full nor true representations of the outward objects? Whether he does not perceive, that sensible objects are always in a flux, and never exist; whereas intellectual objects are permanent, and exist always? Whether he can pretend, therefore, to have any thing more than opinion about the former, and whether the latter alone are not objects of knowledge? Whether the intellectual contemplation of these is not disturbed by the impressions of the other, and whether we are not kept from knowledge by taking opinion for it? Such questions as these, and

many more, we may suppose, that Socrates would ask, according to his usual style, in reply to the Ionic philosopher; after which he would bid you shut your eyes and stop your nose, if you are curious to know why the flower is fine and sweet. He would bid you raise your thoughts by intense meditation, and an abstraction from all particulars, up to the immaterial forms, the first fine and the first sweet. It is by them, he would say, that this flower becomes fine and sweet, just as a thing is big by bigness, or little by littleness, just as one is one by the participation of unity, and two are two by the participation of duality.

If, in the course of your conversation, it should turn on moral subjects, the same method of reasoning would be applied even to them. Should you ask Anaxagoras what goodness is, or justice? he might bid you, perhaps, turn your eyes inward first, then survey mankind, observe the wants of individuals, the benefits of society, and from these particulars frame the general notions of goodness and justice. He might go a step further, and add, this is human goodness and human justice, such as we can comprehend, such as we can exercise, and such as the Supreme Mind has made it both our duty and our interest to exercise, by the constitution of the human system, and by the relations which arise in it; from all which our notions of goodness and justice result, and are compounded. Of divine goodness and divine justice, might this philosopher conclude, I am unable to frame any adequate notions; and, instead

stead of conceiving such distinct moral attributes in the Supreme Being, we ought perhaps to conceive nothing more than this, that there are various applications of one eternal reason, which it becomes us little to analyse into attributes.

The language of Socrates would be very opposite to this. He would bid you turn your eyes from the moral, as well as the physical world, to the intellectual, nor aim at knowledge where it is not to be had, but seek it where it is alone to be had. He would bid you disengage your soul from the incumberment of your body by purification and intense meditation; rise from sense to pure intellect, and, despising the low drudgery that the acquisition of particular opinions requires, aspire to nothing less than general knowledge, a knowledge of the immaterial forms of things, which are antecedent to actual existence, a knowledge which may be obtained in part now, and which will be complete hereafter. He would proceed and insist, for this is the express doctrine of the Phædo, that when you have once mounted up to these eternal, independent, and unalterable ideas, you should make them the foundations, or first principles of all your reasoning, and receive as true, or reject as false, whatever you observe to be agreeable, or repugnant to them. Thus you would become able to imitate God in the exercise of goodness, justice, and every other moral virtue; since his and your ideas of these virtues would be taken from the same originals: and Socrates might the better conjure you, as he

conjured his auditors in the prison, to make yourself as like as possible to your great exemplar, the Supreme Being.

I think you are not extremely conversant in the works of Plato: and you may suspect, therefore, that I aggravate the impertinence of his doctrines. But the truth is, that as I have made Anaxagoras say nothing more than what he would, or might have said, conformably to his manner of philosophising; so I have made Socrates advance nothing, which the Phædo in particular, as well as Plato's writings in general, will not vouch. But since I have brought this rambling Essay down to the founder of the academy, it is necessary that something more should be said about him and his philosophy; for his appearance, and the institution of his school, make a most remarkable epocha in the history of the first philosophy. So remarkable, and so necessary to be well surveyed, that we cannot otherwise discern the true origin of the first philosophy, and the theology which prevails at this hour in our own country, and among all the nations of the West.

SECT. VIII.

Signs, symbols, sacerdotal letters, sacred dialects, and hieroglyphics, were employed by the Egyptian and eastern nations, to preserve and to perpetuate their knowledge. Strange means, indeed! for how imperfectly, how darkly, how uncertainly must this knowledge have been conveyed

veyed both to and from the Greek philosophers? What precision or clearness can we imagine, for instance, that Democritus could find in those ethicks which he is said to have transcribed from the columns of Acicarus in Babylonia? These monuments of Egyptian and eastern philosophy were explained, it may be said, to Democritus and to the other Greeks, who went into those countries for instruction in every part of science, by the brachmans, the magi, the gymnosophists, and the Egyptian priests, into whose colleges they were admitted, and into whose rites they were initiated. I believe that this was so. I believe that the Egyptian and eastern masters explained and commented the hieroglyphical or sacerdotal text to their Grecian scholars; and I believe further, that the scholars set up for masters soon. The philosophy they had learned, marvellous and mystick, suited their genius extremely, and was particularly adapted to their humour, in ages when every man who had pretensions of this kind affected to institute a new sect, or to distinguish himself, at least, by some new hypothesis. But what was the effect of all this. Did they become more intelligible than their masters, or was their knowledge more real? We have in our hands the book Jamblicus wrote in answer to the questions which Porphyry had asked. Jamblicus wrote long after the times we speak of here; but his sum of theology and theurgick knowledge was extracted from Assyrian and Chaldæan memorials, from the columns of the first Mercury, and

from books that contained all the doctrines of the ancients, concerning matters of a divine nature, which were probably the books of the second Mercury, or such as went under his name. In short, from the same sources, from whence the Greeks had so many centuries before derived their knowledge, real and pretended. Was it grown more clear? Was it not in Jamblicus, and in all the Greek philosophers, who mingled up their own conceits with those of their Egyptian and eastern masters, as unintelligible in jargon, as the original of it all could be in hieroglyphics or sacerdotal letters?

Such we may conclude was the first philosophy among the Greeks, from the beginning of the philosophical æra, which we date no higher than Pherecydes of Syros and Thales, dark in its original, and rendered more dark and more confused by men who grafted incessantly one degree of fantastical knowledge on another, and who for want of any criterion to fix their opinions, wandered into every hypothesis, which their warm imaginations, overheated by those of Egypt and the East, could suggest to them. In the midst of this darkness and confusion, Plato arose, about two centuries after the commencement that has been set of the philosophical æra. If he dispelled any of this darkness, it was by introducing a false light into the first philosophy, that led men oftener out of the way of truth than into it: and as to the conclusion, which vague notions and systems of mere imagination necessarily produce, there

there was never any greater than that which arose in metaphysicks and theology, after Platonism began to be dogmatically taught in the school of Alexandria, and in those of Christianity.

This philosopher availed himself of all the fantastical science that was then in vogue. He went into Egypt, he heard Cratylus, a scholar of Heraclitus. He had a philosophical correspondence with Archytas: and that he might improve himself the more in Pythagorean doctrines, he went into Italy and conversed with the principal men of that broken sect. He was a follower and a scholar of Socrates from his youth. Neither Socrates nor he had any great claim to the honour of being first inventors or teachers in any part of science. That the master reduced speculation to action we cannot doubt; and Tully, in his academical questions, describes him pompously as the first who called philosophy off from objects which are placed by nature beyond our reach, and which had employed all the philosophers before him, to the business and duty of common life, and to the consideration of virtue and vice, of good and evil. But publick and private morality, and all the rules of good government, to say it by the way, had been taught long before Socrates, by Solon and the other sages of Greece: and if we compare the success of his mission at Athens with that of Pythagoras at Crotona, as it is represented by Justin*, we shall find no reason to think him either the first or the greatest missionary of na-

* Lib. 20.

tural religion. Sure it is, that he devoted himself to this work with much sincerity, perseveranc , and zeal, and was the martyr of a much purer doctrine than many a modern missionary has died for teaching. All we are to understand, therefore, by what is mentioned above, seems to be this, that he confined his lessons of philosophy to ethicks: and even this cannot be true, if his lessons were such as Plato represents them. I cannot help thinking, that Tully was more attached to Socrates on account of his academical, than his moral character.

There was a greater simplicity, no doubt, in his manner of teaching than in that of Plato, and in the doctrines too, very probably, that he taught. When questions were asked him about another world, he answered with much simplicity, that he had never been there, nor had ever seen any one who came from thence. Plato pretended to know more of the matter, and to have his knowledge from one who had been there, and whom the infernal judges had sent to reveal what he had seen and heard. This idle tale was taken, probably, from the magi or the Chaldeans, if this Erus Armenius mentioned in the tenth book of his politicks, was one of the Zoroasters: and as idle as it is, it got into history*, and has been recorded gravely, among other stories of extraordinary events. But though the doctrines, as well as the manners of Socrates, were more simple than those of Plato; yet we know from

* Val. Max. l. 1. Macrob. somn. Scip.

Plutarch,

Plutarch, and even by the discourses which Xenophon as well as Plato ascribes to him, that he entertained and propagated many of those theological and metaphysical notions, which are not, most certainly, parts of natural theology; because they cannot be necessarily deduced from any knowledge that we have of nature.

Metaphysicks may be said to have succeeded mythology and physicks in Greece about this time, though the name was not invented till long after. Pherecydes, Pythagoras, and Parmenides, made strong pretensions to a science of this sort. But the first and the last founded no sect; and that of the other was soon dispersed and extinguished: though Diogenes Laertius says, by mistake doubtless, that it continued eighteen generations. The writings of these philosophers being soon lost, nor any set of men remaining long to preserve a body of their doctrines, Plato and Aristotle had an opportunity of decking themselves in their plumes, and of coming down to posterity as originals on this and other subjects, on which they were far from being such.

The fables and the superstitious notions that prevailed among the vulgar of all ranks, in the days of polytheism, about their gods, became soon too gross to satisfy those who began in every country to emerge out of ignorance, and to cultivate and improve their reason. In vain did the philosophers and priests endeavour to soften them to such men as these, by all the mystery of their mysteries, into which Socrates would never submit

submit to be initiated, that is, by their secret doctrine. Not only the unity of the Supreme Being, but the absurdity of supposing him to exist a system of matter like other material beings, was discovered, and the notion of a spiritual substance was established. Whether this notion was entertained first of the Supreme Being, and was applied afterward to the human soul; whether it was entertained first of the human soul, and was applied afterward to the Supreme Being; or whether the idea of spirit and spiritual substance was determined exactly either by ancient philosophers, or by christian fathers, as we have determined ours, if even ours is as much determined as we suppose it to be, I shall not inquire at this time. All I mean to observe is, that an intellectual world of subordinate and of created gods, of dæmons, of souls, and other spiritual inhabitants, being once assumed, as it was together with the unity of God, if that which is demonstrated may be said in any sense or on any occasion to be assumed, the philosophers did much the same thing in a metaphysical, as they and the priests had done in a mythological way. They made as many spiritual beings as they wanted, and they generated them as they could. The head of Jupiter opened, and Pallas the goddess of wisdom came out of it, according to the mythologists. This image was too gross, and the fable too impertinent to be retained. Plato, therefore, refined metaphysically upon it, and supposed, for in him it was mere supposition, a

second

second god, the Logos, the word, the wisdom of the first, an emanation proceeding from the first. When this metaphysical generation, by emanation, was once established in opinion, metaphysicks peopled Heaven as fast as ever physicks, by the help of mythology, had done; and it is impossible to consider, without astonishment, how these spiriritual beings were multiplied from age to age, by Pythagorician and Platonick philosophers, by Jewish cabalists, and by christian divines, both orthodox and heretical. A new jargon grew up to express these chimerical notions, and very often to express things of which the learned in those days, as in ours, had not themselves any notion at all. Expansions and diffusions of the most excellent nature, which Pythagoras had learned from the Zoroastrian theology to be a pure and perfect light, and which some of the Greek philosophers called an intelligent fire, processions, profusions, and extensions of the first simple substance, superior lights in the world of emanations, called sephiroth by the Jews, æons, male and female, supersubstantial and substantial beings, numbers, ideas, words, forms, souls that inhabit in Heaven and in the stars, all these terms were used, I say, till they passed for terms of a real science. Thus metaphysicks constituted a sort of polytheism, as mythology had done before; and to show you how little advantage these refined doctrines had over the other, I will bring an instance which I find in Mr. Selden, and which is plainly an ingraftment on the metaphysical doctrines of Pythagoras

goras and Plato; though it be of a later date, as it must needs be, since it is taken from the Jews, who had most probably no knowledge of Chaldaick philosophy till they went into captivity, nor of Greek philosophy till after the expedition of Alexander. Nothing appeared more shocking in all the pagan mythology, than the carnal copulation of gods and goddesses with one another and with mortals, than their adulteries and their rapes, than gods begetting children and goddesses laying in; and yet we may see by a passage of Plutarch, in the life of Numa Pompilius, that these opinions were not only entertained by the vulgar, but were matters of grave speculation and of theological dispute, as much as the incarnation of the Word has been among Christians; for he says, that the Egyptian doctors made this distinction: they held, that a god might get a woman with child, but that a man could have no carnal commerce with a goddess. Now these copulations were carried on between souls in the spiritual world, according to the cabalists, those famous interpreters of Jewish theology, though in a more decent manner, and in lawful marriage, as we learn from Selden*. "The cabalists," he says, "assert, that as a soul descends from Hea-"ven into the embryo of every man, so a new "soul is sent from above into every proselyte of "justice; that which he had while he was a pa-"gan either vanishing or returning." This new

* De Jure nat. et Gen. juxta Discip. Ebræor. l. 2, c. 4.

demand

demand of souls, you see, required a new supply: and these ingenious metaphysicians soon found one that was more than sufficient. They imagined four palaces in Heaven, where the souls of innumerable holy women are married to the souls of holy men; "and they add, that as, in marriages "here on Earth, bodies copulate with bodies, so, "in these celestial marriages, souls copulate with "souls, light with light*." Would not this sample of cabalistical knowledge make any learned divine grieve, that the seventy books of this kind, which Esdras had collected for the use of wise men, are lost?

Metaphysicks not only succeeded physicks and mythology in the manner here observed, and became as great a fund of superstition, but they were carried still farther, and corrupted all real knowledge, as well as retarded the progress of it. Metaphysicians have not been quite agreed about the nature and object of their supposed science. Those we have last mentioned may be called and distinguished by the title, if they like, of pneumatic philosophers, since their object is spirit and spiritual substances; how ridiculous soever it be to imagine spirit less an object of natural philosophy than body. Those we are about to mention may be decorated with a Greek name likewise, and be called ontologists or ontosophists; since

* Addunt ut in conjugiis hujus mundi, seu terrestribus, corpora corporibus conjunguntur, ita in alterius illius, seu cœlestibus conjugiis, esse conjunctionem animarum cum animabus, luminis cum lumine.

their

their object is, being in the abstract, "ens quâ "tenus ens." But the name that suits best all the parts of metaphysicks is that of the præternatural science; because it is synonymous to chimerical science. Who, indeed, but the Author of Nature, can see and know to the utmost extent of it? And who that is not delirious, therefore, can presume to see and know beyond it? What principles can be laid, or how can any be laid, of a science that is supposed to be a first and universal science, and to contain the principles of all others, which are to be deduced from it? One might think that nothing can show so marvellously the wanderings of the human mind, and the prevalence of imagination over all the rational faculties, as this inveterate habit of dogmatising about spirit and spiritual substances, and even about God, the Father of spirits. But there is something still more absurd in the other part of metaphysicks. In this, the foundations are laid in knowledge. Foundations narrow and in no degree proportionable to the hypotheses raised upon them; but knowledge so real, that it is intuitive, the knowledge that they have of their own spirits, minds, or souls, in a word of their own intellectual powers. In the other, the foundations are laid in a supposition which we know, or may know, intuitively to be false; for we may be as certain, that the human mind cannot make the abstractions these philosophers pretend to make, as we are certain that we can walk or run, but cannot fly; and yet this

whole

whole branch of philosophy is built on the supposition, that the human mind can and does make them. Such were the numbers of Pythagoras, if we know what they were: such were the ideas of Plato, and such is that fantastic science which perverts the whole order of real science, by pretending to descend from scientifical and axiomatical down to particular knowledge, and from universals to singulars, instead of attempting, conformably to nature and reason, the very reverse of this.

The supposed abstract ideas, whether simple or complex, were wrought up, by warm imaginations, into eternal essences, incorporeal substances, independent and divine beings, that resided in or with the supreme intellect, and this may be properly called the first apotheosis of folly *; for the same men soon imagined a second. The second was that of the human mind or soul. The human mind or soul was of divine original, according to Pythagoras and Plato, and returned back to the soul of the universe when it left the body; to that soul which is of the same kind and nature, "ad id quod ejusdem generis "et naturæ est †." Now the soul contracting much impurity in its descent into the body, and while it continues in that prison, these philosophers taught, that transmigrations of the soul through several bodies served not only as some degree of punishment, but likewise to purge it

* Stultitiæ apotheosis. Bacon. † Plato.

from these pollutions: and this was the famous doctrine of a metampsychosis, at least of Plato's; for between his, and that of Pythagoras, there seems to have been some difference. In one respect the difference is obvious enough. The metempsychosis of Pythagoras was I think general, and that of Plato not. Plato classed souls, at their going out of the bodies they had informed, into three sorts, the incurable, the curable, and the pure. The first went to the devil, as we should speak, at once. Transmigration served the purpose of the second, just as well as your purgatory, and prepared them to ascend to their ancient habitations in "domesticas quasi ------ sedes *." The last, having been purified before death, wanted no purification after it. For this reason it was, that the philosophy, we refer to, inculcated so much the necessity of abstracting the soul from matter, and of dying during life a philosophical death: the consequence of which was regeneration, being born anew, and putting off the old man to speak in Christian phrase†. Thus the soul might be accustomed to contemplate, in pure intellect, abstract forms, and eternal essences; to retain or to recover by reminiscence it's former knowledge of real beings, "vere en-" tium ‡;" to rise to that supercelestial place and the field of truth, where souls feed on divine ideas §. By such excursions as these, not unlike

* Photius. † Jamblicus. ‡ Ibid.

§ —— In locum supra cœlestem, inque campum veritatis ——elevatas, divinis ideis pasci. Phot.

to

to those that are so ingeniously feigned in the world of Descartes *, the soul may know all things intuitively, like God, in this world, and become God in another.

----- " ubi deposito conscendes corpore cœlum
" Immortalis eris divus †."

Empedocles imagined his soul to be so pure, that a god might be said to dwell in him, and on that account called himself a god, " seipsum appella-
" vit deum ‡." Plato softened this, by adding modestly, " quantum licet homini," as much as a man may be so: but that great pneumatic philosopher Athanasius was bolder than Plato, if he said, what I have seen somewhere quoted from his writings, that, by a participation of the same spirit, we are united to the Deity §.

SECT. IX.

Upon the whole, we may venture to pronounce, that metaphysicians have always proceeded on a false supposition, by neglecting the real phænomena of the human mind, and by ascribing to it an imaginary power. We may venture to say, that their principles became profane and im-

* Le Monde de Descartes, a critical satire on the Cartesian Philosophy, by father Daniel, the jesuit.

† Carm. aurea.

‡ Sext. Empiric. adv. Math.

§ Participatione spiritus conjungimur Deitati.

pious, when they deified their own ideas of the first apotheosis I have mentioned, and that terminated in blasphemy, enthusiasm, and madness, when they deified their own souls by the second. Such philosophy as this, however, suited extremely well the genius, and, if I mistake not, the design of Plato. He was much more a poetical philosopher than Homer was a philosophical poet: and he had the worst grace imaginable when he banished the latter out of his Utopia, whose writings, with no more help than his own require to fix the allegorical and mystical senses, would have done just as much good in his whimsical republick. If Homer has done no good, he has done no lasting hurt to philosophy; whereas Plato, and his scholar Aristotle, did not only improve much errour, but diverted men from the pursuit of truth: and this they did, not only in their own age, but have continued to do it at several periods, and in several degrees, down to ours. Plato treated every subject, whether corporeal or intellectual, like a bombast poet and a mad theologian*, "per ambages Deorumque mi-"nisteria." Aristotle, like an ontosophist and a dialectician, with all the cavil of words and captious disputation†, which serve to nothing more nor better than to exercise a vain and trifling subtilty of wit, and to prove equally well, for in-

* ——— Tumidus poeta, theologus mente captus. Bacon de Interp. Nat.

† Verborum cavillatio —— et captiosæ disputationes, quæ acumen irritum exercent. Sen. Ep. 45.

stance,

stance, that mice gnaw or do not gnaw cheese*, which is an example that Seneca brings by way of ridicule on such philosophers as these, and which might have been applied very strongly to Zeno, the founder of his sect, to Chrysippus, and all the heroes of the portic. But I choose to confirm what I advance concerning the characters of these two philosophers, in better words, and on a better authority than my own. My lord Bacon observes, that almost all the ancient naturalists, such as Empedocles, Anaxagoras, Anaximenes, Heraclitus, and Democritus, subjected mind to things †. That is, they never lost sight of the phænomena of the visible world, but made them the rule, as well as object, of their inquiries: and what is said about this object of physicks, the corporeal world, will hold equally well about the other, the intellectual. But Plato, he adds, subjected the world to thought, and Aristotle even thought to words: the study of philosophy turning into disputation and plausible discourse, and a severe inquisition after truth being laid aside ‡. The meaning of all which is plainly this, that these men turned physicks into metaphysicks and logick; that

* Mus syllaba est. mus autem caseum rodit: syllaba ergo caseum rodit. Mus syllaba est: syllaba autem caseum non rodit: mus ergo caseum non rodit. Ibid. Ep. 48.

† —— Mentem rebus submiserunt.

‡ At Plato mundum cogitationibus, Aristoteles vero etiam cogitationes verbis adjudicarunt, vergentibus etiam tum hominum studiis ad disputationes et sermones, et veritatis inquisitionem severiorem missam facientibus. Parm. Teles. et Dem. Philos.

in order to make, or to appear to make, which answered their end perhaps as well, important discoveries about the nature and truth of things, one of them had recourse to abstract meditation, which agitates the mind in a perpetual round, and can never terminate in certainty for want of a sufficient criterion; and the other, to an artful use of words, by which a learned ambiguity is maintained, and the whole business of philosophers is to tie and untie these verbal knots *. For these reasons, and surely they are decisive, the learned chancellor concludes, that their systems of philosophy ought rather to be rejected in the whole kind than to be refuted particularly, since they are the systems of men who affected to speak much, and who knew little †.

It was said, in the beginning of this Essay, that the pretensions to science unattainable, which end always in fantastical hypotheses, might be excusable in those who made the first essays in philosophy, but were without excuse in those who succeeded them, in the course of philosophical generations. The reflection was levelled, and very justly, at Plato and Aristotle in a particular manner. To pass any such judgment on those who went before them would be very unfair; because their writings are not in our hands, as those

* Nectimus nodos, et ambiguam significationem verbis illigamus deinde dissolvimus. Sen. ubi sup.

† Quare hujusmodi placita magis toto genere reprehendenda quam propriè confutanda videntur. Sunt enim eorum qui multum loqui volunt, et parum scire. Bac. Parm. &c.

of

of these two philosophers are, if indeed the canon of Aristotle's be as well ascertained as that of Plato's, and because the little we can learn of their opinions has been delivered down to us in broken incoherent passages, in confused and inaccurate collections, and by men very often who did not understand them, or who had their reasons for misrepresenting them. To conceive this the better, we need only consider what informations we have of philosophical systems, more modern than those we speak of, and given us by men who were themselves philosophers. I might instance in many, but I will content myself to ask, whether he that should take all his notions of stoicism from Velleius, or of epicureanism from Balbus, or of both from the declamation of Cotta, would do much justice to the portic, or to the garden of Gargettus. These philosophies were absurd enough of themselves; but they were made more so by representation.

We know, in general, that there were philosophers in Greece of great merit, before Plato and Aristotle; that Plato borrowed from them, as well as from Homer, without any acknowledgments of the debt, and that Aristotle did his best to defame or destroy their works: for Aristotle, like an Ottoman prince, as my lord Bacon was fond of observing, endeavoured to put all his brethren to death, and succeeded in his barbarous design *.

* —— Illum scilicet, Ottomannorum more, in fratribus trucidandis occupatum fuisse; quod et ei ex voto successit. De Interp. Nat. et alibi.

Among these, and probably at the head of them, Democritus may be placed. His great reputation gave occasion to silly people, as great reputations do sometimes, to invent a thousand silly stories of him. But of all these, no one was more impertinent than that of his putting out his eyes, that he might meditate with less distraction, which Plutarch, in his treatise about curiosity, says was false, but generally reported. Another, which we find in Plutarch's table discourse*, is much more in character. Democritus having eat a fig which had a taste of honey, far from shutting his eyes and contemplating the first sweet, he started up from his table in haste, to examine the tree, and the place where it grew. His maid, indeed, saved him that trouble, by owning that she had put the figs in a honey pot. But his first, and as it were habitual impulse, was to make use of his eyes, and to examine the phænomenon by observation and experiment, which he made the rule of his inquiries, the criterion of his opinions, and the foundation of all his philosophy. "Ætatem inter experimenta consumpsit," he passed his whole life in experiments.

Diogenes Laertius witnesseth how averse Plato was to this philosopher, and, in truth, Pythagoras was more according to his heart. But it were to be wished, since Plato was to have so great an influence on the progress of science, and since his spirit was to possess philosophers for so many

* Sympos. lib. i, c. 10.

ages

ages, that he had taken his method of philosophising from Democritus rather than from the Samian. The Samian had been instructed, in his travels, in all the parts of philosophy, and he brought particularly the true solar system, no doubt, from his eastern masters. He brought likewise many of their superstitious customs and opinions, and involved, like them, all his doctrines, even the plainest precepts of morality, in mystery. He appears, by the accounts which we find of him in Diogenes Laertius, in Plutarch, in Porphyry, and Jamblicus, to have learned among the Egyptian priests and the magi the great secret of pursuing ambition under the veil of learning, wisdom, and sanctity; and to have formed in his travels the project which he undertook at his return to execute, the project of opening a school, founding a sect, instituting a religion, and governing all the Greek colonies in Italy and Sicily. Democritus travelled, like him, and went to the same schools. In this they were alike. But they differed much in the other respects, which could not fail to determine Plato against Democritus, and in favour of Pythagoras. Neither of them were magicians, I suppose, any more than our learned friar, whom the ignorance of his age would have made to pass for such: and as the credulity of Pliny made him represent them and others to have been. But as Democritus was no more a magician than every able naturalist, chemist, and mathematician, will appear in some

ages,

ages, so he seems to have pretended to no supernatural science and power as Pythagoras did, and much less, like him, to have been the Delian Apollo, or any other divine person, clothed with humanity and conversing with men. In his disputes with the magi, he seems to have opposed real physicks to imaginary metaphysicks, and his knowledge of the animal, vegetable, and mineral world, to all their dreams about the intellectual and spiritual. What we know of the atomical system of this philosopher, whether he invented it, or Leucippus, or a certain Phœnician named Moschus, long before either of them, may seem little consonant to true theism: and yet his animated atoms, and his intelligent and divine species, may be reconciled to it, as well as some opinions that very orthodox divines have advanced. Philosophers may speak too little, and too much, of the Supreme Being and first cause of all things: and neither of old, nor in our days, has the due mean been enough observed. Now if it does not appear that Democritus, whose object was not theology, and among whose works, the catalogues of which have been rather falsely lengthened than shortened, writ any treatise of that sort, we may suppose that he made too little mention, or no mention at all of the Supreme Being, without supposing him for that reason an atheist. Whereas Pythagoras, who made theology his capital, reasoned always from Heaven to Earth, parcelled out the divine nature into a vast variety of beings, interested it and mingled it in every thing,

thing, and contrived to render physicks a rhapsody of enthusiastical opinions and fables; of which proceeding the Timæus in Plato is a very strong and undeniable example. To conclude this comparison, I will only add, that if Democritus did not acknowledge the unity of a First Intelligent Cause, and that was objected to him by a Pythagorean Platonist, for they grew in time to be confounded together, one might ask that famous question, is it no matter "utrum Deum neges, "an infames?" whether you deny or defame God? The ignorance may deserve pity. The defamation deserves abhorrence.

If I have singled out these two, among the philosophers who preceded Plato, and have dwelled so long on their different characters and different methods of philosophising, it has been to show, the more sensibly by the contrast, how and through what channels the wild metaphysicks and all the profane theology of the East has come down principally to these enlightened ages of the West; and how, by the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, philosophers have gone out of the true and natural road to truth into that which has led them into errour, and must keep them in it, by corrupting science even in the first principles.

It is a very true observation, and a very common one, that our affections and passions put frequently a bias so secret, and yet so strong, on our judgments, as to make them swerve from the direction of right reason: and on this principle we must

must account, in great measure, for the different systems of philosophy and religion, about which men dispute so much, and fight and persecute so often. But it is not so commonly observed, though it be equally true, that as extensive as this principle is in itself, since it extends to almost all mankind, the action of it in one single man is sometimes sufficient to extend the effects of it to millions. Many a system, and many an institution, has appeared and thrived in the world as a production of human wisdom, raised to the highest pitch, and even illuminated by inspiration, which was owing, in it's origin, to the predominant passion, or to the madness of one single man. Authority comes soon to stand in the place of reason. Men come to defend what they never examined, and to explain what they never understood. Their system, or their institution, to which they were determined by chance, not by choice, is to them that rock of truth on which alone they can be saved from errour*: they cling to it accordingly, and doubt itself was this rock to the academicians.

What has been said cannot be illustrated better than by the example of Plato. He flourished, as we have observed, about two centuries after the commencement of the philosophical age in Greece; for I think that we must place the commencement

* —— De rebus incognitis judicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhærescunt. Acad. Quæst. l. 2.

at

at Thales, wherever we think fit to place the end of it. The Ionic, the Eleatic, the Italic sects were already founded, and had made much progress and much noise in the learned world, by the publick lessons, whether in regular schools or not it matters little, and by the writings and disputations of several great philosophers, by whom the honour of these schools had been supported, their different hypotheses improved, and their different methods of investigating truth defended. I have said before, that it is impossible to descend into the detail of these systems of philosophy with any assurance; and I will add, in this place, that I have never read any pretended explanations of them attempted by modern scholars, even in an intelligible manner, for this is not always the case, which might not have been for the most part altered, and sometimes contradicted intirely, on the authority of the very same fragments. One thing is certain, however, and we may affirm very safely, that the difference between attainable and unattainable, real and fantastick knowledge, and between the methods that led to one or the other of these, was not hard to be discerned after all the essays that had been made in every part of philosophy, and that were still making when Plato arose. We may believe that there were some who did begin to discern it accordingly, how much soever their notions concerning the First Philosophy had been corrupted, and the use of their reason had been perverted by Egyptian and eastern prejudices. That Anaxagoras did, we cannot

doubt; and the censure Socrates passes on him in the Phædo makes his panegyrick on this head.

Democritus passed his whole life, and lived to be more than a hundred years of age, in a constant application to experimental philosophy. But few there were then, or will be at any other time, who prefer solitude to society, leisure to power, knowledge to wealth, and silent obscure truth to talkative and glittering errour, as this philosopher did. If Plato had followed his example, he might have made possibly a great revolution in the philosophy of his own age, and might have laid posterity under the obligation of learning from him the way to real, instead of being misled by him into chimerical science. He might have stood like a polar star, to direct future generations in their inquiries after truth, instead of becoming an ignis fatuus, that has danced before their eyes, and has led them into errour. But those very dispositions of mind, and that very character which hindered Plato from following this example, procured him all the reputation he acquired, and has enjoyed so long. In those days, as in ours, philosophers sought fame rather than truth, and the foolish applause of mankind could not fail to strengthen that natural bias.

The Greek philosophers, for the most part, resembled the Greek historians mentioned by Strabo. Plato did so most eminently. The historians, observing how fond their countrymen were of those who writ fables, turned history into romance, and studied to make their relations

marvellous

marvellous and agreeable, with little regard to truth; in which they were encouraged, after Alexander's expedition into Asia, by the difficulty of disproving any thing they said of countries so remote. Just so did the philosophers in general, and Plato in particular. They took their ideas and notions superficially and inaccurately from the first appearances of things, and examined and verified them as little as the others did facts. These ideas and notions were combined and compared by them, as every man's fancy suggested: and they had, beside these, in the inexhaustible storehouse of fancy, as many "entia rationis" as might supply all their occasions. Thus the Greek philosophy became a chaos of wild discordant opinions and hypotheses, concerning divine and human, intellectual and corporeal nature, which could neither prove themselves, nor be reconciled to one another. They were the various offspring of imagination. Of imagination that affected to rove in the divine sphere, that of possibility, and would not be confined to the human, that of actuality. These philosophical romances, in the light in which they appear to us, may be compared not amiss to Amadis of Gaul, to Peirceforest, and the rest of those heroical legends, which were writ in the defiance of history, chronology, and common sense, as the others were in defiance of nature and real knowledge; which were the amusements of ignorant ages, and which are feigned so agreeably by Cervantes to have turned the brains of Don Quixote. I apprehend that

that few of them had even the merit which la Calprenede claimed in favour of his Cassandra; for he boasted, that, among the fictions it contained, there was no one which might not be deemed true consistently with history: whereas in the ancient philosophical hypotheses, how little soever we know of them, we know enough to be sure that there were many opinions advanced absolutely inconsistent with the nature of things, and with the dictates of right reason; such as were not only unsupported by either, but as were contradicted by both.

I have touched already the principles from whence all this reasoning madness proceeded; for there is such a thing: and Buchanan used the expression "gens ratione furens," very properly. The man, who walked soberly about in the Bedlam of Paris, and believed himself God the Father, was certainly mad: and yet he reasoned extremely well, when he assured the company, that the other, who called himself God the Son, was an impostor; because he who was the Father knew him not, nor had ever seen him in Heaven. Thus the philosopher, who is in such haste to arrive at general, that he neglects particular knowleege, and takes a bold leap from a few clear and distinct ideas to the first principle of things, how well soever he reasons, is mad. Descartes was mad, whenever he did so: and none but Fontenelle would have made it a proof of his superiority over Newton, who did the very contrary. Ideas may be clear and distinct in the mind, and

yet

yet be fantastical; or have only metaphysical reality. But suppose them as real as you please, yet to make them proper materials of general knowledge, we must not attempt to leap, we must go step by step, and by a slow gradation of intermediate connecting ideas, from particulars to generals. Besides, if we suppose all the ideas we have of both kinds to be in one case real, yet still they may not be sufficient; sufficient I mean in number. The stock we have may serve to establish one general axiom, but not another more general, which we endeavour to raise upon it. In short, he who imagines that he can extend general knowledge, by the force of pure intellect and abstract meditation, beyond the foundations that he has laid in particular knowledge, is just as mad, in thinking he has what he has not, as he who thinks he is what he is not. He is just as mad as the architect would be, who should undertake to build the roof of the house on the ground, and to lay the foundations in the air.

It is not enough to say, that Plato was an heroical poet; nor after Longinus, that he derived from Homer, as from a great source, very many of his doctrines. He had the genius of those dithyrambick poets, who were said proverbially, and with allusion to their extravagant sallies of imagination, never to drink water. He speaks with great respect of a divine fury, the principle of sublime metaphysical and theological knowledge; and he was so full of it himself, that

no man, a little less delirious than Marsilius Ficinus, and a little less simple and bigot than Dacier, can read his writings, as those of a philosopher who sought truth in good earnest, and meant to instruct, rather than to amuse. Ficinus owns *, speaking of the language of this philosopher, that "he raves and rambles, observes "no order like other men in his discourse, and "appears rather to be some priest or prophet, "who raves and expiates, and transports others "into the same fury, than a man who goes about "to instruct." Quintilian † speaks to the same effect: and even Cicero, as partial as he was, is forced to confess, that his style was rather that of poetry than of prose. Let me add, that, when he sinks from these imaginary heights of enthusiasm and false sublime, he sinks down, and lower no writer can sink, into a tedious socratical irony, into certain flimsy hypothetical reasonings, that prove nothing, and into allusions, that are mere vulgarisms, and that neither explain nor enforce any thing, that wants to be explained or enforced.

* Ad Laur. Med. prom.—furit enim interdum atque vagatur, ut vates, et ordinem interea non humanum servat, sed fatidicum et divinum; neque tam docentis personam agit quàm sacerdotis cujusdam, atque vatis, partim quidem furentis, partem verò cæteris expiantis, et in divinum furorem similiter rapientis.

† Multum enim supra prosam orationem, & quam pedestrem Græci vocant, surgit, ut mihi non hominis ingenio, sed quodam Delphico videatur oraculo instructus. l. 10, c. 1.

as

As the founder of the academy drew the grotesque of his theology and metaphysicks principally on the canvas, that Homer and Pythagoras had spread for him, so it seems to me, that he proposed much the same objects of ambition to himself, as the Samian did. I do not mean to make any ill natured reflections on his voyages into Sicily, nor on his intrigues with Dion, nor to insist on those which have been made. If he took a great sum of money, it was to buy books. If he rode into Syracuse in a gilded chariot, drawn by four white horses, and with all the pomp of a triumph, it was to humour the tyrant he meant to reform. If he obtained a district of country in Sicily, as Plotinus did some centuries afterward in Italy, it was with the same design, to set mankind an example of the most perfect form of government. But still we must not think him as *free from* ambition, as Socrates seems to have been. He took warning, indeed, from the examples of Pythagoras and of Socrates. One taught him to moderate his political, and the other his philosophical zeal. But still, with all his apparent moderation, he had an ambition as real as any other, though compatible with moderation, and even leaning on the appearances of it, as on so many necessary supports. There is an ambition that burns as hotly under the mantle of a philosopher, or the cowl of a monk, as in the breast of a hero, and that exerts itself as effectually, and often as hurtfully to mankind, as the other. The cell of Bernard, or that of Hil-

debrand, even before he got the papacy, was a scene of as much intrigue, and as many ambitious projects, as that of Ferdinand the catholick, or of Charles the Fifth. If the character of Dionysius the elder and the younger did not suffer Plato to regulate the government, and exercise legislation in Sicily, nor the dotage of the Athenian commonwealth in his own country, he acquired, however, a much greater dominion than that of Syracuse or of Athens, and held a much nobler and higher rank than that of tyrant or of archon. He could not persuade his countrymen: to attempt to force them he thought unlawful. He retired, therefore, into the academy, and exercised in that retreat, like Bernard, in his monastery, a far greater power, quietly and safely, than any that princes, or the principal men in commonwealths could boast of, with all the trouble and danger to which they stood continually exposed in their publick life. His reputation, and the authority founded on it were such, that appeals were made, and embassadors sent to him from different people, who solicited him to give them laws; a favour he bestowed on some, and refused to others. In another part of the resemblance between Bernard and him, the saint indeed outdid the philosopher very much. He acquired immense wealth to his order, as well as to his particular convent. Whereas Plato left nothing but his philosophy to the philosophers of his sect, in general: and though he increased the revenues of the academy, and though the custom of obtaining

taining further acquisitions of wealth, by the testamentary dispositions of persons who desired to encourage this school, prevailed from his time yet all this would have been but a mite in the Bernardine treasury.

In the last part, which I shall mention, of resemblance between these two theologians, the pagan had vastly the advantage over the christian. The order of the monks, instead of maintaining a superiority over other orders, was soon lost in the crowd of them; or if distinguished, was distinguished only by ignorance and luxury, and the pomp of their principal men. Whereas the sect of philosophers did not only eclipse all those that were more ancient, but outshine and outlast all that were contemporary or of later institution. It spread into Asia, when Alexander carried his arms thither, and into Egypt under the auspices of his successors. Platonism returned back, as it were, to those nations from whom the doctrines of it had been derived originally, altered indeed, but easily known, and therefore eagerly embraced by the true parents; because of the many allegorical, ænigmatical, cabalistical, mystical features which it retained of the family.

I do not believe, that Plato was an enthusiast, in any other sense than your poets affect to appear such, when you call for inspiration and boast of the divine fury: and I could sooner persuade myself, that he was never in earnest, than that he was always so; for which opinion I shall give you my reasons on some other occasion. But sure it

is, that he has made enthusiasts in all ages, and in all churches; in the christian church particularly, the most seraphick saints, and the most extravagant hereticks: of all which I shall have occasion to speak more at large elsewhere; for as this philosopher had a place frequently in our conversations, the mention of him will return frequently in these Essays; which are repetitions a little extended of the former, and which claim some of the liberty allowed in the former.

Platonism flourished in Italy as well as in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt: and the extravagant encomiums of Socrates, Plato, and their school, which we find so often repeated by Tully, would be alone sufficient to show us how highly this philosophy was esteemed in the Roman commonwealth. But though it was held in this esteem, I think that it had received at that time a blow, which made it no longer fit to be propagated with success, as it was then taught. It was become a philosophy for sophists and rhetors only; and the dogmatical varnish, which had imposed at first, being taken off by Arcesilaus and Carneades, there remained nothing in it, on which the minds of men, that seek naturally to be determined and fixed, could rest with complacency. Cuppeity and tableity, those ridiculous abstractions, which Diogenes laughed at Plato for supposing, had passed in the world; but to make men doubt of the existence of the cup and the table was impossible.

The most absurd system, that is dogmatical, will

will prevail sooner and longer, and more generally, than that of the second or third academy, or that of Pyrrho did, which arose about the same time; and the dullest Stoician that ever was would have persuaded men to assent to this proposition, "the world is a wise being*," as readily as to this, in a bright sunshine, "it is now light," much sooner than Carneades would have persuaded them to lay aside all claim to decision, and to confound true and false in the class of probability †. It is not worth while to enter into any nice distinction that may be made between these philosophies. It is enough for our present, or any other reasonable purpose, to consider them all together, as the systems, if they can be called systems, of men who entertained a perpetual suspension of mind, denied that any certainty was to be had, and disputed, at most, about probability. Such a man as Tully, who was ostentatious of his eloquence, might very naturally take, as he did, this part upon him ‡. He protests, in his academical questions, against any imputation of ostentation indeed; but there will be no uncharitableness in laying much more weight

* Nec magis approbabit nunc lucere——hunc mundum esse sapientem. Cic. Acad. Quæst.

† Philosophiam——quæ confundit vera cum falsis spoliat nos judicio. Ibid.

‡ Si aut ostentatione aliquâ adductus, aut studio certandi, ad hanc potissimùm philosophiam me applicavi, non modo stultitiam meam, sed etiam mores, et naturam condemnandam puto.

on what fell from him in the second Tusculan, where he confesses, that the custom of disputing for and against every thing pleased him much, because it was "maxima dicendi exercitatio." In short, although the academicians chose a much more easy task, when they undertook to refute the Stoicians and the Epicureans, and every other dogmatick sect, than that of defending the apparent dogmas of their masters would have been; yet it seems to me, that they could not have stood long on that foot, nor have acquired the fame, which those madmen, who succeeded them in the profession of Platonism, acquired.

Antiochus, the third in succession from Carneades, and the last in the direct academick line, began to deviate from the principle and conduct of Arcesilaus, improved by Carneades: and, under pretence of reviving the old academy and genuine Platonism, he taught dogmatically the doctrines he found in Plato, and blended them with those of the portic and the lyceum. From this time, the false sublime of Plato began to speak more strongly than ever to the imagination, to the affections and passions, and, aided by the quibbles of Zeno, and the subtilties of Aristotle, in a short time after to the prejudices of mankind. I speak thus generally, because Platonick philosophy, which had been confined to schools in Greece, in Asia, and in Egypt, or had been cultivated by a few particular genii at Rome, became fashionable, and spread more than ever, when it had reassumed the gaudy dress of which

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it had been stripped in the academy, for seven generations of philosophers at least. If the Roman ladies were not Platonicks in love, they were such in philosophical speculation: and the emperors Hadrian, Antoninus, and Marcus Aurelius, for instance, were as fond of the philosophical gown, as of the imperial mantle. Julian was so, not long after them, to a degree of fanaticism.

SECT. X.

When I come to speak of authority in matters of religion, of the Christian particularly, it will be proper to show how Platonism was incorporated with it: how the former served to deck out the artificial theology grafted on revelation, and how the latter served to perpetuate the former. Here I consider Platonism relatively to the effects it has had on science in general; and as to them, I say, that they have perverted the use of reason, and corrupted the first elements of human knowledge, or substituted such as are fantastical in the place of such as are real. These first elements of human knowledge are the ideas we acquire, according to the established order of human nature, from the very dawn of life. As we grow up we learn of course to examine, to compound, and to compare these in some degree or other, and sufficiently for our ordinary use in the stations and circumstances of life wherein we are placed. If all this be not very accurately done, as it is not always, and perhaps seldom, there arises very

rarely any great inconveniency from it. But the case becomes extremely different in matters of higher concern, in those of philosophy, and of the first philosophy especially. The more complex, and the more abstract our ideas and notions are, the more likely are we to frame or retain them ill, the consequence of which must be errour on the most important subjects that can exercise the human mind. What shall we say then of a writer who has not only propagated on these subjects fantastical ideas and notions for real, with an imposing air, but has attempted to turn mankind out of the way of framing any others on every subject? Shall we say, that he was the philosophical Homer? We shall trifle egregiously if we do. Allusion, allegory, metaphor, and every part of figurative style is the poet's language. Figments of imagination are his subject. The philosopher may sometimes employ the former cautiously, and under much control: the latter never. Reason must be his guide, and truth alone his subject. When they are not such, though he keeps the name, he goes out of the character. He is guilty of fraud. Plato was eminently guilty of it, and the taint has descended, like that of original sin, to his posterity.

All his lineal successors have followed the example he set them, in several forms, according to their several talents. They attempted it even in physicks. But errour of this kind has not been established, nor fixed, nor sanctified. Corporeal nature affords a publick standard obvious to sense,

and

and by which every man may try the ideas and notions of another, whether they be fantastick or real; and for this reason physical knowledge has been in almost a constant course of improvement, the errours have been from age to age corrected, and the sensible phænomena, which are the objects of it, being numberless, it has been vastly extended, as well as ascertained, in these latter ages. Since the revival of experimental philosophy, speculative whimsical naturalists have imposed no more than Ovid, who did not mean, nor than Lucretius, who did mean to impose, their physicks for true philosophy.

Plato did his best to disgrace this criterion, and to persuade men not to trust to it, even to verify their simple ideas of sensible objects. Metaphysicks suited his purpose better, just as a half light suits better than a full light the purpose of one who has false wares to vend. We have indeed in our minds a criterion of spiritual nature, and of manners purely intelligible. But this criterion is not as publick, and as common to all men, as the other. However fantastical, inadequate, or confused and obscure the ideas and notions of another man may appear to me, he is at liberty to affirm, that they appear quite otherwise in his mind: and though I may not believe him, I cannot contradict him. What can I say to a mystick, who boasts of special grace, and divine illumination; or to a metaphysician, who pretends to make incomprehensible abstractions, and to clamber up Plato's mystick ladder, from opinion

to

to knowledge, the knowledge of immaterial forms; more than this, I perceive no such illuminations, I can make no such abstractions, I have no such ladder? These divines and philosophers are stopped, like their fellow creatures, on the very outskirts of the intellectual world, notwithstanding their boasts: and if they related nothing of it more than what they have felt, seen, and known, they would relate nothing more than other philosophical travellers. But as they pretend to have gone farther, they may well pretend to have felt, seen, and known more.

Plato was such a traveller, and the father of philosophical lying to us, who are not acquainted with those who preceded him. Those who preceded him might neglect an exact determination of ideas, and a steady use of words, the signs of these ideas, which is no more than all philosophers are apt to do. But he is to us the first who taught men, instead of distrusting, to renounce their senses in the search of truth; and, instead of taking their ideas from the outward impressions, and inward suggestions of nature, to take them from an assumed region of ideas, which never existed out of delirious brains. This doctrine, that poisons science to the very roots, is in part so absurd, and in part so notoriously false, that we may justly wonder how he could mistake the truth in one case, and affirm, if he really meant to affirm, and expected to be believed, directly against it in the other. That we cannot have

have knowledge of sensible objects, absolute knowledge, a knowledge of the essences of the substances, is most true; not for the reason he gives, because they are in a perpetual flux, always generating, never existing: but because we cannot discern by our senses their inward constitutions and first qualities, nor any thing more than their effects on us. Such knowledge is relative to our state, and would not be the same in another. It is human knowledge; no more: but still it is one kind of knowledge, and very sufficient for us. I have not an opinion; I know that I am warmed or burned: and if Christianity had been never published, I should have known, not believed, myself to be a man, not a cock. As Malebranche, who was transported by the delirium of Plato, by that of Descartes, and by his his own all at once, made use of faith to realise sensitive knowledge; so Plato found in the intellectual world the forms and essences of substances, as well as the ideas and notions that we have of mixed modes and relations. All these, according to him, were fixed and permanent, eternal exemplars and divine entities, and therefore the sole objects of science. Reason was placed between the objects of intellect and of sense. The "first belong to God, and to some of the elect "among men*." When reason rises up to the first, it acquires the knowledge of things divine:

* Intellectus autem Dei proprius, et paucorum admodum electorum hominum.

when

when it descends to the latter, it is filled with the errours of opinion. Science is therefore "a com-"prehension of things divine by reason*." I take the substance of what is here said from Marsilius Ficinus, to whose exposition of Plato's meaning there can be no objection made: and I add, that if I took the whole, the jargon would be still more surprising.

What man, who was not in the delirium of a metaphysical fever, and who turned his eyes coolly and soberly inward, has not seen, that we know nothing of sensible objects but what our senses discover to us, and our memory retains of them after they are discovered: and that all those ideal entities, the abstract forms of them, are the bold fictions of imagination? Who ever reflected on the operations of his mind, and did not perceive, that all his ideas, or complex notions of mixed modes and relations, are the creatures of the mind, who puts them together for her use as experience and observation direct, nay, arbitrarily, if she pleases; that he never discerned them any where but in his own mind; that they are of mere human production, and that, as they are often variously combined or compounded by different minds, so they are seldom preserved in any mind steadily and invariably? Shall we be afraid then to say, that the doctrine of ideas in Plato is absurd and false, and that he has, by

* Divinarum rerum certa comprehensio. Mars. Ficin. Ep. in Theætetum.

teaching

teaching it, corrupted the first elements of knowledge? It is manifest that he has done so; too manifest to be denied; and for this reason his admirers have endeavoured rather to accustom mankind to the absurdity, by their constant imitations of it, than to defend it.

Notwithstanding all that has been observed, and much more might have been observed, to show the fallacy and impertinence of a philosophy that has been so long admired, this philosophy has rolled down a torrent of chimerical knowledge from Pagan and Christian antiquity, with little opposition, and scarce any interruption, to the present age; for which reason it is as necessary to expose the futility of this philosophy now, as it would have been many centuries ago. Not only Pagan, but Christian theology, has been derived from Plato in great measure; and, as strangely as that may sound, even from Homer too, if he imitated Homer as much, and borrowed as much from him, as Longinus and others of the ancients affirm. There is a certain marvellous which dazzles and seizes the mind, the philosophical as well as the unphilosophical; and the man who, thinking he understands, admires his own understanding, as well as the man who admires, because he does not understand. This gave a great lustre to the Platonick philosophy; and is employed, in season and out of season, so as to run through almost every part of it. But there is something more to be observed. Plato affected to write so equivocally and so inconsistently, ac-

cording to different subjects, and different characters of interlocutors, whom he introduces in his dialogues, that he might pass either for a dogmatist or a sceptick. The latter academy took this hint: but they followed a middle course, denying certainty to the dogmatists, and maintaining probability against the scepticks: in which middle course they could not, however, have maintained themselves long, as it has been observed already. The latter Platonicians therefore assumed the doctrines of their master to be dogmatical, taught them with all their own improvements as such, succeeded better, and lasted longer. Thus has the fame of this school been preserved, and the philosophy been propagated, under different forms, to one uniform purpose, to seduce men out of the precincts of real knowledge.

SECT. XI.

Not only curiosity was indulged, but vanity was gratified by it. An identity in nature, or a cognation, as the learned Cudworth calls it, of the divine and human mind being once established, it is no wonder that the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge were confounded, and became undiscernible. The farther we carry our discoveries concerning the animal system, wherein we have our place, the more proofs we find that all the parts of it are full of life, and sense, and intelligence, in an inconceivable variety of degrees, but in some degree or other: and Male-

Malebranche had reason to say, "les petits ani-"maux ne manquent pas aux microscopes, comme "les microscopes manquent aux petits animaux." Now the moral effect of such a survey as this should be, both a greater adoration of the Supreme Being, and a greater humiliation of ourselves, who are so closely connected with the rest of the animal kind. But the profane assumption we speak of here, which had its foundation in the Platonick and Pythagorick systems, tends to lessen our admiration and adoration of the Supreme Being, or at least the humiliation of ourselves, by taking our thoughts off from the sensible connection between us and other animals, and by applying them to an imaginary connection between the divine and human nature. There are no anthropomorphites I think left, but there have been men among the most devout theists of paganism, and there are those among Christian philosophers and divines, who join God and man as absurdly, by a supposed similitude of intellect, knowledge, and manner of knowing, as those hereticks did by a supposed similitude of figure. Vanity has not only maintained this absurdity among the followers of Plato, but spread it among those of different sects. I will not turn to the extravagant passages of this sort, that are to be found in the writings we have of the latter Pythagorician Platonists. I will mention one only from those of St. Austin, which happens to occur to my memory, and may serve "instar omnium." Nothing is superior to the human soul, says that father, but God. "Nihil

"est potentius....nihil est sublimius. Quicquid "supra illam est jam Creator est." This doctrine the saint learned, as he learned that of the divine logos, from Plato, or from those madmen, the disciples of Pythagoras and Plato. In short, the vanity of the human heart indulged itself in this kind of flattery so much, that even the Stoicks borrowed the same notions. Human reason is, according to Seneca, not only a portion of the divine spirit immersed in body, the same in God and in man, with this sole difference, in him it is perfect, in us capable of perfection*; but it was an axiom of that school, that the soul is divine, and all divines are the same†.

Philosophers being thus drawn, in their own conceit, out of that class of beings in which the Creator had placed them, and having placed themselves, according to their own good pleasure, and without any other claim to it than arbitrary assumption, in a sort of middle state, at least, between God and man, in which too they pretended themselves able to place others by certain metaphysical nostrums, these mountebanks and their zanies were easily induced to imagine, that since their souls were immortal, and participant of the divine nature, they were capable of knowledge of all kinds, and of wisdom more than human, even while they wore the garb of human-

* In corpus humanum pars divini spiritûs mersa—diis hominibusque communis. In illis consummata est. In nobis consummabilis.

† Divinorum una natura est.

ity.

ity. Believing themselves wrapped up in pure intellect, while they were in truth transported by mere imagination, they assumed their knowledge, like their nature, to be divine. Clogged by bodies, and confined for a time to this inferior system, they could not enjoy the full prerogatives of their own, nor attain complete absolute knowledge. But still they enjoyed and exercised these prerogatives in a good degree, clogged and confined as they were, when they abstracted their souls from their bodies, by spiritual exercises and profound meditation, and rose by this abstraction in pure intellect up to contemplate the divine ideas, and to know, if not as much as God, yet in the same manner, and much more than other men. Plotinus, who was so ashamed to wear a body, that he would never suffer any picture of it to be drawn, had been ravished more than once, as Porphyry affirms, to a union with the Supreme Intelligence, and he himself had been so once. It was not hard for such philosophers to believe, and to make it believed, that the knowledge unattainable by others was attainable by them, and that while ordinary persons, incumbered by body, and grovelling on earth, acquired with much pains a little particular knowledge, they had the metaphysical secret of rising to universals.

Such as these were the men, who, issuing from the schools of Pythagorick and Platonick philosophy, disturbed the progress of real knowledge, and, by flattering the vanity of the human mind,

turned it to fantastical. Heathens adopted these notions the more easily, because they had already adopted those of genii, of dæmons, of celestial and supercelestial gods, who formed a chain of intelligence from the human up to the Supreme. Christians, too, might adopt them the more readily, because they had other as undetermined ideas of cherubim and seraphim, of thrones, principalities, powers, and virtues, of archangels and angels, of three hierarchies, and nine choirs of celestial spirits, figments of crack-brained enthusiasts, such as Denys the Areopagite, and the scholar of St. Paul, if in truth there was any such person, and if some pious knave did not forge the book, and an author for it. These notions might serve, as well as those of the heathens, to form an intellectual chain, and a short gradation of intelligence from God to man. But orthodox Christians had no need of any such chain: they knew, by the Scriptures, that the correspondence between God and man was often immediate, and even intimate and familiar with his elect, and with such purified souls as were prepared for it. They found in the Old Testament one example of a patriarch translated very corporeally into Heaven; and one in the new, of an apostle ravished thither, he knew not how. But the whole tenour of the sacred writings represented the Supreme Being in frequent conference with his creatures, God covenanting, or making bargains with man, and man with God; God holding the language of man, reasoning, arguing, expostulating, in a very human

human manner, animated by human affections, and appealing to human knowledge. In short, they believed farther, on the same authority, that the word, the wisdom of the father, the very God, had been incarnated here on Earth, assumed a human body, lived like a man with men, and died at once by their hands, and for their sakes. It could not be hard, surely, for those who believed all this, and who were accustomed to think in this manner of the divinity, to be persuaded, that God knew by the help of ideas, like man, so close was the analogy between their natures; that there were two regions of ideas, the one of ideas of sense, the other of ideas of pure intellect; that the former being nothing more than representations of appearances, and relative solely to the system in which they arose, nothing more could be acquired by them than probability, and opinion founded on it, sufficient indeed for vulgar use, though not so for philosophical purposes; but that minds illuminated by philosophy could rise to the higher region, in which alone certainty and scientifical knowledge were to be acquired by contemplating those intellectual ideas, abstract natures, eternal essences, incorporeal substances, and all the objects of metaphysicks.

From such fantastical notions we know, that men set out in search of fantastical knowledge above two thousand years ago, and how much sooner we cannot say. In hopes of reaching unattainable, they neglected attainable knowledge, scorned to confine themselves to that to which

they were confined by the Author of Nature, and attempting to rise above the level of humanity, they sunk below it; for they surely are below it, who imagine themselves to be what they are not, to have knowledge where they can have none, and to want it where it lies open to their industry.

It would have been no agreeable attempt in those days, nor is it a welcome one in these, to fix the bounds of attainable and unattainable knowledge. The philosophers we speak of are as ridiculous in a quite contrary sense, as the learned mandarins of the Chinese. The mandarins had decided, that China, a part of Tartary, the other states that lay round them, and the neighbouring islands, contained the whole world. They knew no other, they inquired after no other, and were astonished, therefore, when the Jesuits showed them a map of the two hemispheres. The philosophers remain unacquainted with their own country, and inquire little about it, or about those that lie nearest to it. They are wholly taken up with imaginary countries at an immense distance, where they never were, and concerning which they can have no intelligence from any that have been there. But the absurdity of absurdities is this: they pronounce dogmatically, and they pretend to demonstrate when they speak of these unknown countries, and they sink into doubt and hypothesis when they speak of their own.

Could philosophers have been persuaded to analyse

analyse the human mind, to examine intuitively the faculties of it, and to compare them with the objects of their inquiry, the extravagant notions spoken of might have been soon exploded, the progress of fantastical knowledge might have been stopped early, and that of real knowledge might have been advanced without interruption.

But the ill star of knowledge contrived to render this impracticable. It has been said, that Aristotle was an ungrateful scholar to his master, Plato. It may be so; but this obligation, at least, the master had to the scholar: the scholar raised a mist that hindered men from discerning, as they might have done, sooner or later, the absurdity of this philosophy; and this mist continued thickening before the eyes of men for many ages. The Romans were far from correcting and improving the Greek philosophy. They contented themselves to translate and imitate; and the same servile manner of philosophising was followed after the resurrection of letters. A ridiculous veneration for Plato revived with them; and Aristotle maintained in the schools the empire he had usurped every where during the dark ages of Gothick, of Arabian, and of ecclesiastical barbarity. The ancient fathers of the church had recommended these two philosophies sufficiently to more modern doctors, by their example and writings. But Aristotle had helped to defend what Plato had helped principally to establish; and as defence grew more and more necessary from age to age, so the reputation and authority

of Aristotle, which were great in the Mahometan, seemed to rise above those of Plato in the Christian schools of philosophy; or, at least, to be more employed in them. I am not ignorant that many passages of the fathers, and other Christian writers, may be cited against the peripatetick philosophy. But these passages serve only to multiply proofs, that these venerable persons were apt to contradict one another, and even themselves. Cardinal Palavicini was very angry with Father Paul for saying, when he speaks of the sixth session of the Council of Trent, wherein so much use was made of the distinctions of the stagyrite, that, without this assistance, "we "should have had many articles of faith the less*." The cardinal denies the fact so little, that he justifies the proceeding by the example of those ancient councils, who did the same when they distinguished so nicely substance, person, and hypostasis. I know not whether it be true, though I incline to believe it if Melancthon said it, that the ethicks of Aristotle were read publicly in some churches instead of the Gospels. But every one knows, that he and his philosophy have been spoken of by great divines and most devout persons of the Christian and Mahometan churches, in terms so hyperbolical, that they are blasphemous.

By such combinations of circumstances, and by

* Noi mancavamo di molti articoli di fede. Hist. del Con. l. 2.

others

others that were favourable to the Aristotelian philosophy, a jargon of words that seemed to explain, without explaining, and the rules of a dialectick, that seemed to prove, and that did prove indifferently, either in favour of truth, or of errour, took up the whole attention of philosophers, and rendered it impossible for them to make any advances in learning and knowledge. All the rational powers of the strongest minds were so misapplied, that giants employed themselves in picking straws; and men, whose intellectual sight might be compared to that of Lynceus, wandered about in a metaphysical and logical mist, always in search of truth, finding it seldom, and mistaking often even errour for it. Fantastical ideas, new invented words, and new applications of old words, put into a quaint, syllogistical form, made up the sum of the mirabilia, the inopinata, and the paradoxes of the Stoicks. Much in the same manner did schoolmen proceed in subtilising their ideas and notions, and in turning and winding them by rules of art, without any concern to compare them with nature, and to verify and fix them by what is. The consequence has been, that although much of the cant of the schools is laid aside, yet many fantastical, or undetermined ideas and notions, and many unmeaning words, or words of vague signification, which grew into use, or were confirmed in use then, impose still; and that even some of our finest writers banter themselves, and others with them. It must not be imagined, that he who reasons,

reasons, or seems rather to reason closely and consequentially, has therefore truth always on his side. To be sure of this, we must be sure, that his words have ideas and notions perceivable by us attached to them; we must be sure, that all these are steadily employed; and we must be able, by a careful analyse of the ideas and notions, where there is the least room for doubt, to discern whether they are fantastical or real, and adequate and complete, clear and distinct, or the contrary, relative to the subject about which they are employed. If we do this, we shall be neither seduced by declamation, nor deceived by argumentation. Some writers impose, as fairies and enchanters in romances are said to have done; but if we do this, their charms will be broke, and either nothing, or something extremely absurd or weak will appear, where a stupendous and solid pile presented itself to our first sight. If we neglect this, not only Malebranche, or the bishop of Cloyne, those excellent poets, may lead us agreeably "per ambages deorumque ministeria," through such mazes of errour as none but the brightest genii are able to contrive; but your ghostly father, if you had one, might undertake to convince you, by dint of logick, that, when he affirms the same body to be at the same instant in different places, he is far from affirming, that the same body is and is not in the same place.

SECT.

SECT. XII.

It will sound oddly to some ears, that the right use of reason, and the right conduct of the understanding in the investigation of truth, and the acquisition of real knowledge, is a very late discovery; and yet nothing is more certain. It was not near so soon after the resurrection of letters, as it might have been expected, that the fantastical and fashionable philosophy of Plato and Aristotle began to be exploded. Little by little, however, there arose men who made this use of the light that increased gradually in the orb of science. There were some essays made, faintly, diffidently, and occasionally at first, like those of men, who, emerging out of darkness, were dazzled as well as enlightened, or of men who were sensible that they might suffer for saying, that they had seen what they had seen, or that they knew what they knew, in opposition to the confirmed prejudices of mankind. Others followed with greater assurance, like men born in the light, whose eyes were able to bear a greater effulgence of it, and who beside this had less, for even they had something to fear from ecclesiastical, abetted by civil power. One of these, and the first that deserves to be named in this roll, was our Verulam, that astonishing genius, who durst form the design of rebuilding science from the foundations. I presume not to say how near he brought this design to bear, and how practicable he left it. But this I may say, that the foundations

foundations were ill laid before his time, and that he laid, on the rock of nature and truth, such as can alone support this building. The meanest cottage, that art ever raised, can rest on no other safely; and the most stupendous pile of philosophical systems may rest on these immovably. Whatever esteem he was tempted to think, by a review of their scattered remains, that the more ancient philosophers of Greece might deserve, he considered the works of Plato and of Aristotle, which have been alone preserved, as the bane of philosophy. They had been followed servilely from their own age to his, by which means they had stood as barriers against all improvement, and the poisonous springs they had opened, continued to infect all the streams of knowledge. He attempted, therefore, to depose these tyrants in philosophy, and to draw men off from the enthusiasm of one, and the sophistry of the other; from the contemplation of confused and ill-abstracted ideas and notions; and from a wanton, not to say a fraudulent use of words, to the contemplation of nature, and a strict regard to things. The very first aphorism of the novum organum states the only true object of human knowledge, and limits that which every man may be said to have acquired, to what he has discovered of nature by observation and experience*.

* Homo naturæ minister, et interpres, tantum facit et intelligit, quantum de naturæ ordine, re, vel mente, observaverit; nec amplius scit, aut potest.

Human knowledge, to be real, must be derived from, and tried by what really is, according to my Lord Bacon and to truth; and he was so far from indulging the licentious use, which philosophers make of that dangerous power of the mind, the power of imagining what may be, and of erecting hypotheses into systems of knowledge, that he insists on the necessity, not that we should doubt of every thing, but that we should examine every thing, that we should purge our minds of all those idols, as he styles them, those false and superficial notions, that are taken from vulgar opinion, and at best from philosophical rumour, which were the foundations of Platonism, though Plato used some sort of induction, and of peripateticism; and finally, that the mind being thus prepared to receive the direct or reflected rays of truth, we should not reject, but assist and control sense in a course of learned experience, abstract our notions from things with the utmost accuracy, and proceed, as far as we can proceed, in the same manner, to aphorisms and axioms more and more general.

While the fame of this great man was fresh, and his works were in every learned hand, both at home and abroad, Descartes arose, another luminary of the philosophical world, and I could easily suspect, that my Lord Bacon's writings were not unknown to him; for as little as it is pretended he used to read, he did not disdain to borrow from authors of inferior note of the same country: and they who repay with ample interest,

like

like Descartes, into the common stock of learning, need not be ashamed to borrow sometimes. The French philosopher, like the English, made clear and distinct ideas the necessary materials of knowledge. But then, as he left this important article too general and too loose, so while he built up truth with one hand, he laid a foundation for infinite errour on the other. He disarmed the scholasticks; but he furnished arms to the mysticks. Beside clear and distinct ideas, he admits a certain inward sentiment of clearness and evidence. The word sentiment is applied in the French language so variously and so confusedly, that it becomes often equivocal. But since it is distinguished, on this occasion, from ideas, it must be meant either to signify that immediate perception which the mind has of some selfevident truth, in which case it is not a principle of knowledge, but knowledge itself, intuitive knowledge; or else it must be meant to signify that apparent evidence, wherewith notions and opinions enter into the mind of one man, that are not accompanied with the same evidence, nor received in the same manner, in the mind of another. Now, in this case, the lively inward sentiment of Descartes is nothing better than that strong persuasion, wherewith every enthusiast imagines that he sees what he does not see, hears what he does not hear, feels what he does not feel, and, in a word, perceives what he does not perceive. If any thing else be meant by sentiment, thus distinguished from idea, as a principle of

of knowledge, I confess myself unable so much as to guess what it is. But notwithstanding this, Descartes holds a high rank among those benefactors to mankind in the advancement of knowledge, who freed human reason from the chains of authority. He improved natural philosophy by geometry, and geometry by algebra: in which respect he showed the way to our Newton.

Gassendi was another of these reformers of philosophy, and the restorer of the atomical doctrine. He exposed, even to ridicule, the dialecticks of Aristotle; he disarmed the peripateticians of these enchanted weapons, and would have completed, by his victories over them, the subversion of their long established empire, if he had not apprehended, with reason, enemies much more formidable than mere philosophers, because armed with ecclesiastical and civil power. It is this fear, which has hindered those who have combated errour in all ages, and who combat it still, from taking all the advantages, which a full exposition of the truth would give them. Their adversaries triumph, as if the goodness of their cause had given them the victory, when nothing has prevented their intire defeat, and reduced the contest to a drawn battle, except this, that they have employed arms of every kind, fair and foul, without any reserve; while the others have employed their offensive weapons with much reserve, and have even blunted their edge when they used them.

If it was my design to speak of all those, who have advanced real knowledge in all it's parts,

since the resurrection of letters, beyond such of the ancients, at least, as we are acquainted with, the roll would be a long one. But my intention being to speak of those alone, who have studied the human mind, rectified, or pretended to rectify the errours of it, and thereby improved, or pretended to improve our reason, I shall content myself to mention two that are the best known to me. Mr. Locke, and the author, perhaps I should say authors, of the Logick of Port Royal.

The first steps toward a right conduct of the understanding, and a just discernment of unattainable knowledge, and of that which is attainable, in different kinds and degrees, are an accurate analyse of the mind, a careful review of the intellectual faculties, as well separately as in their cooperations, and an attentive observation of the whole intellectual procedure, natural and habitual, as it has been hinted already. When this is well and truly done by any writer, the reader will feel consciously that it is so; for he will perceive the phænomena of his own mind to be such as they are represented, and he will recollect, that the same things have passed there, though he has not always, or at all observed them. This happens to me when I read the Essay on Human Understanding. I am led, as it were, through a course of experimental philosophy. I am shown myself; and in every instance there is an appeal to my own perceptions, and to the reflections I make on my own intellectual operations

tions. I know that this method is disagreeable to some, and I am not surprised that it should be so. There are those who think they do not want it; and they are those who want it most. There are those likewise who fear it; because they apprehend, that analyse of ideas and notions, that comparison of them with the real nature of things, and that steady precision in the use of words, would reduce many a dogmatick system to pass for nothing better than a fanciful hypothesis, as it really is.

The logick of Port Royal will suit such persons as these, and especially those of the second sort, much better. In whatever language or country this treatise had been published, it would have appeared to be not an art of thinking, but an art of thinking conformably to Christian doctrines, and to those of Rome particularly. It is contrived to mangle and distort human reason, so as to proportion it, I do not say to revelation, but to theology; though theology should be proportioned to reason; and I add, that if reason could be made by abuse to serve the purposes of this theology, it might be made by no greater, nay by the very same abuse, to serve the purposes of any other, Pagan or Mahometan. Now this proceeding is unfair; and he who holds it means to deceive, not to instruct. The true art of thinking must be the same among all mankind, since their intellectual system, and the things of nature, from which their ideas and notions ought to be abstracted, are the same. But if this example was

followed, the art of thinking would vary, as the different metaphysicks of Mencius and Descartes, or the different theologies of the bonzes and the Jesuits, vary. Art should direct practice: but thus, practice would direct art. There would be one art of thinking for Christians, one for the doctors of Mecca, one for the literati in China, and so on.

Though I give, on this occasion, a preference to Bacon and to Locke, over Descartes and the author of the Logick of Port Royal, it is not from so mean and contemptible a motive as this would be, that they were Englishmen. The advancement of knowledge, and the improvement of reason are of common concern to all rational creatures. We are all of the same country in these respects: and he who thinks and acts otherwise is a promoter of faction in the great commonwealth of learning. As much as I admire these two philosophers, I am not blind to their errours; for even I, who have not telescopical eyes, can discern spots in these suns. I can discern a tincture, and sometimes more than a tincture, in Bacon, of those false notions, which we are apt to imbibe as men, as individuals, as members of society, and as scholars, and against which he himself is very solicitous to put us on our guard. I am convinced, more by his example than by what he says, that these false notions render the admission of truth into the mind more difficult, and the hold of errour more strong. I can discern, in Mr. Locke, sometimes ill abstracted

stracted and ill determined ideas, from which a wrong application of words proceeds, and propositions to which I can by no means assent. I confess further, that I have been, and am still, at a loss to find any appearance of consistency in an author, who published a Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul, and a treatise of the Reasonableness of Christianity, which he endeavours to prove by fact and by argument, after having stated, as clearly as he had done, the conditions and the measures of historical probability; and after having written, as strongly as he had done, against the abuse of words. I think, that neither Bacon nor Locke have kept up entirely to their own rules. But I think these rules are established by them more truly than by any others.

That they are not so, in one very considerable instance, by Descartes, I have observed already, and shall not seek for any other in that respectable author. But the charge I have brought against the logick abovementioned is so very heavy, and this fault, among others, runs so evidently through the whole book, that I think it necessary to produce some examples of it. To produce them will be sufficient. I shall make few or no reflections on them. Turn, if you please, to the fourth chapter of the first part, and to the fourteenth of the second, which treat of the ideas of things, and the ideas of signs, and of the propositions wherein the names of things are given to their signs. You will soon see how far this writer was from meaning any improvement to human

reason, by all the trifling matter he puts gravely and dogmatically together.

That we have ideas which are made sometimes to stand as signs of other ideas is true, and so we have ideas which are made to stand in the relations of cause and effect to other ideas. But the ideas of both these kinds may be considered unrelatively, and they become ideas of signs, or causes, or effects, by an occasional act of the mind, which joins them sometimes properly, and sometimes improperly, in these relations, to others. The idea of respiration, like that of spontaneous motion, is one of those that compose our complex idea of every animal. It is a part of the idea, not a sign of the whole. It cannot be the sign of any particular animal, because it is common to all animals. It cannot be the sign of animality, or the supposed abstract idea of animal, because we have no such idea. It cannot be the sign of that confused crowd of ideal animals, that the mind represents to itself, whenever we endeavour to think of animals in general, any more than the sign of any particular animal. They all imply it, and they may be said to be so many signs of respiration, just as well as respiration to be a sign of them.

But be this as it will, about which it is silly to bestow many words, let us observe that this author, who pretends to teach men how to think, endeavours to impose on them very grossly, as if he had imagined, that they could not think at all without his help. Having amused his readers with the

the hypothesis of ideas of signs, made such by nature in some cases, and by institution in others, that are sometimes certain and sometimes probable, all which is very proper to perplex the thoughts of young logicians; he slides in, as evident examples of what he advances, such as have not even an apparent connection with it. He distinguishes most nicely between signs that are joined to things, and signs that are separated from them. Symptoms, he says, the signs of sickness, are joined to sickness. Let it be that they are so in nature, and in our ideas, however this matter might be otherwise explained. But then he adds, as if all these were things analogous, "thus the ark, the sign of the church, was joined "to Noah and his children, who were the true "church at that time: thus our material tem-"ples, the signs of the faithful, are often joined "to the faithful: thus the dove, the sign or "figure of the Holy Ghost, is joined to the Holy "Ghost: thus the washing of baptism, the sign "or figure of spiritual regeneration, is joined to "this regeneration." In speaking of signs, that are separated from things, he is not so profuse of examples. He produces one only, but that as appositely as any of the others. It is taken from the sacrifices of the Mosaick institution, which were, he says, so many signs of Jesus Christ offered up in sacrifice.

I might conclude my extracts here. But since it is of use to show how great reason there is to guard against the fraud, as well as madn essof

philosophy, it may be proper to mention a few more passages of the same absurdity or ridiculous importance out of this famous book. We are told then farther, that "a thing may hide and "discover another thing at the same time. It "may be thing and sign at the same time, and "may hide as thing, what it discovers as sign. "Hot ashes, as a thing, hide the fire; as a sign, "discover it. The forms that angels borrowed, "as things, hid them; as signs, discovered them. "The eucharistical symbols, as things, hide the "body of Christ, as signs, discover it." Again, we are taught, that "the nature of a sign being "to excite in the senses the idea of the thing "figured by the idea of the thing figuring, as long "as this effect subsists, that is, as long as this "double idea is excited, the sign subsists, even "though the thing be destroyed in it's own "nature. Thus, it is of no moment whether "the colours of the rainbow, which God has "taken for a sign that he will destroy mankind "by a deluge no more, be real and true, provided "that the same impression be always made on "our senses, and that they" (can he mean our senses?) "make use of this impression to con-"ceive the promise of God. Just so, it is of no "moment, that the bread of the eucharisty subsist "in it's proper nature, provided that the image "of bread, which serves us to conceive in what "manner the body of Christ nourishes our souls, "and how the faithful are united one to another, "be excited constantly in our senses." One may

now

now safely challenge the ablest professor in Bedlam to crowd more nonsense into fewer words, and yet it is faithfully extracted from a book, which is put into the hands of young men, as I remember that it was into mine, in order to improve their reason, by teaching them a right determination of their ideas, and a right conduct of their understanding.

To say the truth, though experimental philosophy has been vastly improved by the moderns, and though a true conduct of the understanding may be said, justly enough, to be a new discovery in general, yet the same reformers, who have rooted up a monstrous crop of old errours, have left some of these, and have planted others. The First Philosophy, particularly, has been overrun with both; and learning has finished the round which ignorance began. In the darkness of ignorance, superstition prevailed: in the light of knowledge, overweaning curiosity, the offspring of self-conceit, as self-conceit is of pride. Both are natural to the human mind, and each of them developed itself into activity at different times, and in that state of things that was proper to it. Superstition first: for ignorant, uncivilised people, who are fierce to their fellow creatures, are timid and docile under every apprehension of superior power. Of these dispositions, in favourable conjunctures, the Persian Zerdusht, whoever he was, the Indian Foe, and the Arabian Mahomet, knew how to profit; and the magi, the bonzes, and the doctors of Mecca, were not at

liberty, if they were inclined, to frame their notions of the first philosophy, according to nature and truth. They were to think on the principles their masters had laid. These were to be asserted, not examined. Fact was to be bent, and common sense perverted, into a conformity with them. Puerilities and vulgarisms were to be taken for marks of a divine simplicity, and the ravings of enthusiasm for the mysterious language of inspiration. If the case has not been quite so bad in the Christian world, yet I will undertake to show you, in another of these Essays, as I endeavoured to do in one of our conversations, that the superstitions of ignorant ages, and the fantastical knowledge of those that were more learned, have produced some as extravagant opinions in theology among Christians, orthodox and hereticks, as any we can reproach to the Mahometans, or even to the Pagans, and that they work their effect even at this hour.

All errours, even those of ignorance and superstition, are hard to remove, when they have taken long hold of the minds of men, and especially when they are woven into systems of religion. But there are some from which men are unwilling to depart, and of which they grow fond, for a reason that has been often touched. As men advance in knowledge, their self-conceit and curiosity are apt to increase, and these are sure to be flattered by every opinion, that gives man high notions of his own importance. What contradictions and inconsistencies are not huddled together

together in the human mind? Superstition is produced by a sense of our weakness; philosophical presumption by an opinion of our strength; and superstition and presumption contribute alike to continue, to confirm, and propagate errour.

A system of philosophy, which had not contained a system of theology as well as politicks, would have been held in no esteem among the ancients. Many such were formed, but with these considerable differences between the two sorts. Errours in rules of policy and law were easy to be corrected by experience, like errours in natural philosophy. Nay, the first were so the most, because how little regard soever philosophers might have to experience in either case, the truth would force itself upon them or others; in one by the course of affairs; whereas it must be sought, to be had in the other. But when it was sought, it was obtained. Errours in theology and metaphysicks could not be thus corrected; neither easily, not at all, among men who seemed tacitly agreed to admit and confine themselves to no criterion in these sciences, neither to the phænomena of their own spirits, in their doctrines about spiritual nature, nor to the works of God, and the conduct of his providence, in their speculations about his attributes.

Another difference between systems of theology and those of politicks and laws, has been, and always must be, this, that the latter may be various, nay, contrary to one another, and yet be such

such as right reason dictates, provided they do not stand in opposition to any of the laws of our nature. But in theological reasonings, and those which are called metaphysical, the various opinions may be all false, or if they are not all so, one alone can be true. This consideration should have had two effects. It should have rendered philosophers and divines more cautious in framing opinions on such subjects, and less positive in maintaining them from the beginning; and when they found a multitude of questions arise, which were indeterminable for want of a sufficient criterion, they should have ceased the pursuit of unattainable knowledge, and have confined themselves to the improvement of that which God has judged sufficient for us, and has given us the means of acquiring. The very contrary has happened, to such a degree of extravagance, as must seem delirious to every one who is not in the same delirium. Can he be less than mad, who pretends to contemplate an intellectual world, which he assumes, in the dull mirror of his own mind; of which he knows little more than this, that it is both dull and narrow? Can he be less than mad, who perseveres dogmatically in this pretension, while he is obliged to own, that he arrives, with many helps, much pains, and by slow degrees, to a little imperfect knowledge of the visible world which he inhabits, and concerning which he is therefore sober and modest enough to reason hypothetically? In a word, can he be less than mad, who boasts a revelation superadded to

reason,

reason, to supply the defects of it, and who superadds reason to revelation, to supply the defects of this too, at the same time? This is madness, or there is no such thing incident to our nature; and into this kind of madness the greatest genii have been the most apt to fall. A St. Paul, profound in cabalistical learning; a St. Austin, deep read in Plato; a father Malebranche, and a bishop of Cloyne. Elevation of genius makes them giddy; and these men, like those who are born in the purple, imagine they can do every thing they have a mind to do, because they can do more than others. The mistake has been fatal to both; to these heroes in philosophy, as well as to the others. Though all men are not placed on the same level, there is a level above which no man can rise; and he, who compares the nature of his mind with the nature of things, will be sure to find it.

I have now thrown upon paper all that occurs to my present thoughts, or all that I have leisure to digest and extend, of what has been thrown out in many conversations concerning the folly and presumption of philosophers, the rise and progress of their boasted science, the propagation of errour and superstition, and the partial attempts that have been made to reform the abuses of human reason. It has amused me in writing; I wish it may amuse you in reading, and be of instruction to us both. Regular treatises and complete systems you do not expect from me; nor should you have them, if I had a much higher

higher opinion of my own capacity than I have. My superiors in knowledge and parts would do better, perhaps, if even they were content to write Essays, that they might improve, correct, or reject, as I am always ready to do, on farther observation, reflection, and information. In the mean time, what has been now said may be sufficient, as I think, to establish the general proposition, that there would be more real knowledge, and more true wisdom among mankind, if there was less learning, and less philosophy.

POSTSCRIPT

TO THE

SECOND ESSAY.

HAVING observed, in the foregoing Essay, how absurdly and presumptuously philosophers reason, upon a supposed analogy of the human with the divine mind, while they scorn to look downward, and to observe the real analogy that there is between the mind and soul of the whole animal kind, the human species included; it has come into my thoughts, to add the reflections that follow, as relative to the same object.

You

You may see in Tully*, that the Stoicks, who observed the internal and external constitutions of men to be very differently affected, according to the different climates, concluded from thence, that there were creatures of more sublime natures in purer air, and filled unknown spaces with these unknown inhabitants. I am far from embracing this hypothesis; but it seems to me, that there is a probability sufficient to force our assent to another, which has prevailed less, because it is founded on a degree of astronomical knowledge, that few persons have now, or had anciently; whereas the former is a mere wild assumption of imagination. The hypothesis I mean is that which we find in the Cosmotheoros of Mr. Huygens, and from which Fontenelle has borrowed the materials of his pretty book of the Plurality of Worlds. Though I give this hypothesis so modern an original, because it is best known, and sufficient for my purpose, I am not ignorant, that it had been advanced before, and that Orpheus, as well as Mr. Huygens, peopled the planets. We have reason to think he did, by those verses which Proclus has preserved, and in which the Thracian bard speaks of houses and cities in the moon. But how old or new soever this hypothesis may be, it assumes, you know, that the planets of our solar system, and the same may be assumed of those of a multitude of other solar systems, which the immensity of the uni-

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 2.

verse

verse contains, are worlds, that have an analogy with ours, and the habitations of animals, that have an analogy with us. The analogy must be, no doubt, very remote, in such a vast variety of positions, constitutions, and laws of nature; but still there may be, and there are, very probably, relations, both physical and moral, between all these numberless worlds and systems of worlds, as between various parts of one stupendous whole, and the habitations of ten thousand times ten thousand millions of intellectual corporeal beings, who live, like us, under the providence, general or particular, of the incomprehensible Creator of all things.

Shall we be so absurd and so impertinent now, as to imagine, that all these creatures of God, though corporeal like men, are confined to the same degree of intelligence, or even to the same manner of knowing? Or, rather than believe that they are in these, and, perhaps, in other respects, superior to us, shall we assert, that there are no such beings, and deny that they exist, though we discover some of their habitations? Philosophers, who lived before the invention of microscopes, might have asserted, just as well, that the "minima naturæ," imperceptible by their minuteness, as these beings, by their distance, did not exist. We cannot discern a gradation of beings in other planets by the help of telescopes, as we observe such a gradation by the help of microscopes in our own; but the gradation of sense and intelligence in our own, from animal

to

to animal, and of intelligence, principally up to man, as well as the very abrupt manner, if I may say so, in which this evidently unfinished intellectual system stops at the human species, gives great reason to believe, that this gradation is continued upward in other systems, as we perceive it to be continued downward in ours. We may well suspect, that ours is the lowest, in this respect, of all mundane systems; since the rational is so nearly connected, as it is here, with the irrational; and there may be as much difference between some other creature of God, without having recourse to angels, and archangels, and man, as there is between a man and an oyster.

We are not able to conceive any manner of knowing which we have not; and yet certain it is, that there may be many such. But even if we assume arbitrarily, that there is no other manner of knowing, as those profane divines do, who confine that of God himself to knowledge by ideas; yet will it be still evident, that other creatures of God may enjoy the same faculties that we have in a more perfect manner. It is easy to conceive, for instance, that there may be animals, whose senses can penetrate the inmost constitutions of substances, and who, having ideas of their real essences, know the first general principles and causes, where we know nothing more than some particular effects. There may be minds wherein ideas and notions, once received or framed, never fade nor vary. Such minds may discern,

discern, at one glance, and by immediate intuition, the agreement or repugnancy of all their ideas and notions. The solution of the most difficult problem may be to them as easy, as the comparison which shows the equality of twice two to four is to us. In a word, there may be, and it implies no contradiction to suppose, that there are, creatures, in other systems of animal being, tempered with finer clay, cast in nobler moulds, than the human, and animated by spirits more subtile and volatile than ours, whatever theirs or ours are. It were to be wished, that philosophers, who are so intent on the least probable hypothesis, would contemplate this, and would compare the manifest imperfections of their own nature with the possible, nay probable excellencies of other animal natures. They might avoid one extreme into which they are apt to fall, by looking down on inferior beings; and another, by looking up at superior. This double view would teach them neither to undervalue human nature, as some have done; nor to overrate it, which is the folly of more.

What has been here said concerning the intelligent inhabitants of other planets is purely hypothetical. It can pass for nothing more; but I am sure that it is much more consistent, and more conceivable, than the other system, which prevails in our days, as it did in those of old. The system of an intellectual world, a world of immaterial ideas, and of spiritual natures. Neither is it liable to have such absurd notions and practices

tices grafted upon it, as have been grafted on the other. The inconsistency of maintaining, like Pythagoras, that the human soul is a portion of the Deity, "particula divinæ auræ," and, at the same time, that there are other spiritual beings between God and man; or, like St. Austin, that there is no mind existent between the human and the Supreme Mind, "nec ulla natura interposita," and, at the same time, that there are intelligencies superior to man, and inferior to God; the inconsistency of these opinions, I say, is equal, and equally obvious. But, on the other hand, to deny, that there is any affinity between the Supreme and created intelligencies, is very consistent with this assumption, that the chain of intelligence from man upward, through many orders of created intellectual beings, is immeasurably long; though the uppermost link of this chain is not supposed to be fastened to the throne of Infinite Wisdom, nor to be nearer to it than the lowermost. Again; since our planet is inhabited by corporeal intellectual beings, the hypothesis, that assumes the other planets to be so likewise, is much more conceivable than that of legions of angels, of dæmons and genii, and of pure and impure spirits, which pagan theology invented, and Jews and Christians adopted. Whether we suppose these beings immaterial, according to the present mode of opinion; or, whether we suppose them, as the ancients, both heathens and Christians, did generally, to be fine material substances, like that whereof they made the human soul, or

wherewith they thought proper to clothe it in it's separate state, and of which Tully says in his Tusculans, "tanta ejus tenuitas, ut fugiat "aciem;" whichever we suppose, this hypothesis stands on no other foundation, philosophically speaking, than that of a mere possible existence of such spirits as are admitted for divers theological uses. The other hypothesis is founded on what we know of actual existence. We are led to it by a plain, direct, and unforced analogy. We know that there are habitations; and we assume that they are inhabited.

The first might appear plausible, as it did in those ages when poets and philosophers, as well as the vulgar, imagined that the Supreme Being, who spoke, to use a common expression, and the universe was made, and every act of whose will is sufficient to destroy it again, stood in need, like some earthly monarch, of ministers to attend his throne, of messengers to convey, and of troops to execute his orders; when they looked on the visible world as on a great palace, whose floor was the Earth, and whose ceiling or upper story was the sky*; and when, in consequence of such fantastical notions, they supposed the upper story, or Heaven, to be the habitation of gods, and of other celestial persons, as the lower story, or Earth, was that of men. But it is time that these wild imaginations should have no longer any place in the first-philosophy. As far as revelation

* Cujus cœlum laquear, et terra pavimentum.

realises

realises and sanctifies them, they must be employed by the divine, and he has in revelation a sufficient authority for employing them. The philosopher, whose object is natural theology, has not the same; because the reality of such existencies cannot be deduced from any knowledge he has of nature, and because he cannot be justified in going beyond the bounds which this knowledge prescribes. Faith and reason, revealed and natural knowledge, ought to be always distinguished; lest one should be confined, and the other extended too much; and divines and philosophers should keep in their distinct provinces.

Thus they proceed, for the most part, in matters of natural philosophy. The modern philosophers, though very good Christians, communicate the wonderful discoveries that have been made in corporeal nature, and concerning the true system of the universe, without any regard to their repugnancy to the Mosaic history of the creation, and to almost all the notions of the sacred penmen, which were plainly those of an ignorant people and unphilosophical ages. When such of these philosophers, as are divines, endeavour to reconcile to philosophical truth these apparent contradictions to it, they do but shake the authority of the Scriptures, and show, most evidently, how necessary it is to keep theology and philosophy each on its proper bottom, and to avoid at least, by comparing these different systems, to demonstrate that they are irreconcilable. St. Austin and others paid, as divines, no regard to

cosmography, and flatly denied the antipodes. The inquisitors at Rome denied, that Galileo saw what he said he saw, and punished him very consequentially for saying that he saw it. Several divines follow the same method. They enter into cosmographical disquisitions no more than St. Austin, nor into astronomical any more than the Roman inquisitors, but content themselves to take the history of the creation according to the literal and obvious sense, as they find it related in the book of Genesis, and as they would take any other journal, or historical relation. They who have done otherwise, and have found, upon trial, that this relation, thus understood, could not be reconciled to nature, reason, philosophy, nor natural theology, for natural theology teaches us to think of God in a manner very opposite to the ideas which Moses gives of the Supreme Being and of his operations, have made use of two expedients little favourable to the Mosaick history; for some have assumed it to be in this part wholly mythological, and others, unable to wrest natural philosophy into an agreement with it, have so wrested the text into a seeming agreement with their philosophical theories, as to make it plain, that this text may be applied to any hypothesis, with some ingenuity, a skill in languages, and a knowledge of antiquity.—But I stop here, a digression that might carry me, insensibly, a great way; and that was intended only to show, that since men have not admitted, in favour of revelation, a system of physicks, that is inconsistent with

with philosophical truth, there is no reason for admitting, in favour of the same revelation, a system of pneumaticks that is so too; whereas an hypothesis, that has some foundations of probability in natural philosophy, may be admitted, for this reason, by the philosopher, and even by the divine, for another reason, because it is not inconsistent with revelation. If it be said, that the pneumatical system, which establishes so many orders of spiritual beings, is not inconsistent with any knowledge that we have of nature; that it is properly a system, because it is established on revealed authority; and that if we consider it in a philosophical light alone, and merely as an hypothesis, it is better founded than the other; since we may assume, that there is a world of spirits, from what we know of our own spirit, by a more direct and easy analogy than that by which we assume, that the planets are inhabited by corporeal intelligent animals: if this be said, the answer is obvious and decisive. That there are such spiritual beings as the authority of revelation is brought to prove, may not be inconsistent with some philosophical truths, but is so with others. Let it be, that any knowledge we have of natural philosophy does not contradict this system, yet is it suspicious to the first philosophy, because unnecessary; and inconsistent with it; because the reasons for the generation, to speak like the heathen, or the creation, to speak like Jews and Christians, of this unnecessary world of spirits, the supposed manner of

their existence, and the uses to which they are put, or suffered to put themselves, with a multitude of other circumstances, stand in opposition to several truths of the first philosophy, or natural theology, and have served only to promote polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. These dogmas, then, for if they are revealed they cease to be hypotheses, must be solely maintained on the authority of the Scriptures.

If the divine keeps on that ground, he cannot be defeated. He may own his inability to answer the objections, and to solve the difficulties opposed to him; or may refuse, more prudently still, to give any attention to philosophical reasonings, by urging, that a time will come, a time appointed of the Father, when every knot will be untied, and every seeming repugnancy of reason to revelation will be reconciled; and that he is contented, as the philosopher ought to be, to wait for that time. The rabbi might defer his answer till Elias comes; the Christian till the Messias comes in his glory, and till the consummation of things. In the mean while, a sort of truce should take place between the divine and the philosopher. The former should forbear the vain attempt of bending reason to support revelation in this case, which is often done in many others, and almost always with notable prejudice to the latter. The philosopher should forbear to invade the province of the divine, on this condition; and should content himself to assert and promote natural theology, without opposing it to

super-

supernatural. Both of them might thus concur in receiving the hypothesis of planetary worlds, which does not require to be contrasted with the other, nor should have been so by me, if I had not thought it necessary to show, at the same time, that there are probably finite created intelligencies vastly superior to the human, and that there is, however, no such gradation of intelligent beings, as raises the most elevated of them a jot nearer to the Supreme Intelligence than the lowest. I oppose this theological system, and I defend the philosophical hypothesis the rather, because, by these means, we may combat the pride and presumption of metaphysicians in two most flagrant instances, in the assumption of a gradation of the same intelligence and knowledge from man to God, as I have said already, and in that by which man is made the final cause of the whole creation; for if the planets of our solar system are worlds inhabited like ours, and if the fixed stars are other suns about which other planets revolve, the celestial phænomena were no more made for us than we for them. That noble scene of the universe, which modern philosophy has opened, gives ample room for all the planetary inhabitants, whom it leads, and even constrains us to suppose. Where the spirits of the other system reside, was a question easily answered, when superstition and hypothesis made up the sum of theology and philosophy. But it is not so easy to be answered now. Are the good and pure spirits in Heaven? But where is Hea-

ven? Is it beyond all the solar systems of the universe? Or is it, like the intermundia of Epicurus, in expanses between them? Are the evil and impure spirits in Hell? But where is Hell? Is it in the centre of any one planet for every system? Or is it in the centre of every planet? Do others wander in air, or reside latent in every element? Are they confined invisibly, like those that the Chinese imagine, to certain countries and cities, to rivers and lakes, to woods and mountains? Or is it their employment to attend on particular men, the guardian angels of some, or the devils and the tempters of others; for temptation is ascribed to the evil spirits still, though possession is so no longer, I think, out of Spain and Portugal, and other countries where religious ignorance prevails as much as in them, if any such there are?----Tantum---

ESSAY THE THIRD:

CONTAINING

SOME FURTHER REFLECTIONS

ON

THE RISE AND PROGRESS

OF

MONOTHEISM;

THAT FIRST AND GREAT PRINCIPLE OF NATURAL THEOLOGY, OR THE FIRST PHILOSOPHY.

ESSAY THE THIRD.

SECTION I.

I HAD finished the last Essay, before I recollected, that there was something in Mr. Locke's discourse concerning the Reasonableness of Christianity very repugnant to what I have advanced about the knowledge of the one true God, and to what I shall have occasion to say, on another occasion, about the ignorance of natural religion, under which it is supposed that mankind laboured before the coming of Christ. I shall not anticipate the second point, but shall bestow some more reflections on the first; in order to judge, while the subject is fresh on my mind, whether I ought to retract any thing that I have said to you in conversation, or that has fallen from my pen upon the subject. If it appears, on examination, that my notions are not so well founded in fact, and in reason, as those of this great man in the present case, I shall submit with pleasure to an authority that I respect extremely in all cases; and if it appears that they are better founded than his in both, one useful lesson will be the result of this examination. We shall learn how unsafe it is to take for granted any thing in matters,

matters, especially which concern, or which are thought to concern, religion, that we have not ourselves examined, and how inexcusable it is to do this in cases wherein we may be able, with a little pains, to judge for ourselves.

The first article of natural theology, in which the heathen were deficient, according to Mr. Locke, was the knowledge of one God, maker of all things. He admits, at the same time, that the works of nature, in every part of them, sufficiently evidenced a deity; and that, by the impressions of himself, God was easy to be found. These assertions do not seem very consistent, and therefore it is added, that the world made so little use of their reason, that they saw him not.... sense and lust blinded their minds. But the rational and thinking part of mankind, he confesses, found the one supreme, invisible God, when they sought after him. If this be true now, as it is most certainly, the heathen world made as good use of their reason, for ought I can see, as the Christian world. In this it is not the irrational and unthinking, but the rational and thinking part of mankind, who seek and find the true God; and just so, we are told, that it was in the other. Besides, if this be true, it follows, that this great and fundamental article of natural theology is discoverable by a due use of human reason; and Mr. Locke acknowledges accordingly again, that God was found by the wise and virtuous, which is a limitation of no great significancy to his purpose, since the vicious would have sought him in

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no state of mankind, nor the foolish have found him. But, says this writer, the wise and virtuous had never authority enough to prevail on the multitude, and to persuade the societies of men, that there was but one God. If he had proved, as well as affirmed this, he would only have proved, what no man denies, that sufficient means to reclaim men from polytheism and idolatry, and to establish the belief of one God, appear to have been wanting in general, and to a great degree, as far as the memorials we have of ancient nations can show. He would not have proved, that the light of nature was insufficient, nor that the religion of nature was defective in this respect. He would not have proved, what he had in view to establish, that the belief and worship of one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone, and that it was their particular privilege, and advantage, to know the true God, and the true worship of him; while all other nations, from the beginning, adored the host of Heaven, as Eusebius asserts very confidently, though he is far from proving it.

Eusebius took much pains, and used much art, I might say artifice, to spread an opinion, that this knowledge and all good theology were derived from the Jews, and from their Scriptures; nay, that the philology and philosophy of the whole learned world were purloined from thence, and the heathen were plagiaries, who lighted their candles at the fire of the Sanctuary, as some modern Eusebius or other, Gale, I think, expresses

expresses himself. Josephus had gone before Eusebius in the same design; for thus far Jews and Christians made their cause common, and he had begun to falsify chronology, that he might give his nation a surprising antiquity. Eusebius did the same, and, without taking the trouble of descending into particulars, many of which are acknowledged by learned and orthodox writers, I may say, that from that time to this, or to the time when, by the revival of letters, and the invention of printing, which made the knowledge of antiquity more easy and common, much the same practice was continued with much the same success. Ancient memorials have been forged and altered for this particular purpose, mere assumptions have been delivered as facts, and nothing has been neglected to give, not only antiquity, but illustration, to a nation that never had much of the latter out of their own writings, and those of christianity. As the history of the Jews was committed to the care of their scribes, so the propagation of every learned system, that could tend to the confirmation of it, by reconciling anachronisms, and by colouring improbabilities, has been the charge of a particular order of men among Christians, who had the monopoly of learning for many ages, and who have had a great share of it since. This has been imposed on the bulk of mankind, prepared by their prejudices to acquiesce under the authority of great names, and frightened from examining, by the enormous piles of Greek, and Latin, and eastern languages,

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in which such authors seem to entrench themselves.

Notwithstanding this, I will say, and, if I know any thing, I say it on knowledge, that these entrenchments are not tenable. They cannot be battered down always, perhaps, by the same arms by which they are defended; but sure I am they may be undermined, and he who searches their foundations will find that they are laid on sand. Josephus and Eusebius will be of great use to him against themselves. Their writings are repertories of valuable fragments, and of such as would be more so, if more credit could be given to the fidelity of those who cite them. I have sometimes thought, that we might apply properly enough to the Jew and the Christian author, what la Bruyere says, in his Characters of Perault, that he quoted so many passages from ancient writings, while he attempted to prove the superiority of the moderns, that his works were read for the sake of these passages.

Thinking in this manner, I could not fail to be surprised, when I found such assertions as are mentioned above, in a treatise writ by Mr. Locke. The common herd of writers copy one another in every point, that makes for their common cause, about which alone, and not about truth, they seem to be concerned. They affirm, over and over, so positively, and so long, things destitute of proof, or evident falsities, that even the last grow into belief, according to the practice of the court of Rome, as father Paul represents it, in her usurpations. I should not

have easily suspected Mr. Locke of such a proceeding, nor of affirming dogmatically what he had not sufficiently examined. But he has writ below himself in this instance, by going out of his way, and has assumed the spirit of those who write on the same subject, much like Sir Isaac Newton; who lost himself in the vague probabilities of chronology, after having pursued, with so much success, the certainty of mathematical demonstration.

I meddle not here with any thing that is said concerning the clear knowledge of their duty, which was wanting to mankind, as Mr. Locke affirms very untruly, before the coming of Christ, nor with the theological part of this treatise. I confine myself to these propositions, that all the heathen were in a state of darkness and ignorance of the true God, and consequently, that the belief and worship of one God was the national religion of the Israelites alone. Now here I observe a want of that precision, which this great man is so careful to keep in all his other writings. As he does not distinguish enough the want of a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, and the want of sufficient means to propagate it, which he rather confounds in all he says about them, so he uses these two expressions, the true God, and one God, as if they were exactly synonymous; whereas they are not really so, and the explanation and the justification of the distinction, in the present dispute, will set the matter on a very different foot. It is not unity alone that constitutes the

complex idea, or notion of the true God. There is, there can be but one such Being, and yet a monotheist may be as far from the knowledge of the true God, as the rankest and most superstitious polytheist. I have taken notice, in the precedent Essay, how the belief of one God, and of many, was reconciled in the heathen theology several ways; and what I have touched transiently, may be soon made out fully in the intellectual system. A polytheist, who believes one self-existent Being, the fountain of all existence, by whose immediate, or communicated energy, all things were made, and are governed, and who looks on all those other beings whom he calls gods, that is, beings superior to man, not only as inferior to the Supreme, but as beings, all of whom proceed from him in several subordinate ranks, and are appointed by him to the various uses and services, for which he designed them in the whole extent of the divine œconomy; such a polytheist, I say, will approach nearly to true theism, by holding in this manner nothing that is absolutely inconsistent with it; while the monotheist, who believes that there is but one God, and ascribes to this God, whom he should conceive as an all-perfect Being, the very worst of human imperfections, is most certainly ignorant of the true God, and as opposite to true theism, as the atheist; nay, he is more injuriously so. Mr. Locke would have done like himself, if he had made these reflections before he had joined in the common cry; and he might have thought,

perhaps, in that case, that the coming of Christ was necessary to give the Jews true notions of God, as well as to convince the Gentiles of his unity.

Instead of this, he takes the common opinion for granted, supposes what is in question, and does not so much as attempt a proof. He says, indeed, that "there was no part of mankind.... "that had a greater light of reason, or that fol- "lowed it farther in all sorts of speculations, "than the Athenians; and yet we find," he adds, "but one Socrates among them, that opposed "and laughed at their polytheism..... and we see "how they rewarded him for it." He quotes, in the same place, the reproach that St. Paul made to this people. "Ye men of Athens, I perceive "that in all things ye are too superstitious, for, "as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I "found an altar with this inscription, 'To the "unknown God." If these were meant for proofs of what he asserts, they were unluckily chosen. Matter of fact is mistaken in one, and in neither of them is there the least colour of argument. Socrates was so far from opposing the religious worship established at Athens, that he held it to be the duty of every citizen, to follow the religion established by the laws of his city, as we know, upon good authority, that of Xenophon; and if we turn to the Euthyphro in Plato, we shall find him declaring, in his zeal for polytheism, against all the traditions, which he judged to be unworthy of the gods, though they were believed

believed and respected by the vulgar. This was his crime. He neither opposed, nor laughed at polytheism, though he certainly believed the unity of the Supreme Being; but the zeal of bigots in those days, as in ours, made it no less criminal to reject the abuses of religion, than to profess atheism; and a faction in the state took advantage of this, to put him to death.

But if we suppose, for argument sake, that he was put to death for opposing and laughing at polytheism and idolatry; if the Athenians were superstitious, as they were undoubtedly; and if they dedicated an altar to the unknown god, what will all this serve to prove? It will prove only, that men are apt, and even the most judicious, sometimes, to erect their scanty knowledge of a few particulars into a supposed general and certain knowledge of any subject. A little tract of land passes with them for the whole world, two or three nations for all mankind, and two or three thousand years for all antiquity. Are we able to compare the Athenians very exactly in this respect, or in any other, with the people who flourished at the same time, and of whom we have some accounts in history and tradition? How much less are we able to compare them with so many other nations, of whom not so much as the names are come down to us, or were known to them? What argument, then, can be drawn from the polytheism, idolatry, and superstition of this little state, to that of the whole world, which is the point to be proved? or from

the Athenians in the days of Socrates, or St. Paul, even to the Athenians themselves, in the ages whereof the priests of Sais talked to Solon; nay, to the whole race of mankind in these, and still more ancient ages, for even these were not deemed the first?

I might leave the argument here, since the author of the Reasonableness of Christianity offers no other proofs of the facts he advances. But I think myself obliged to justify my opinion, so contrary to his, and to that of the whole crowd of scholars, on whose authority he rests. Great men take great liberties, and expect to be believed on their words; and the disciples of Mr. Locke have as good a right, as the disciples of any philosopher, to use the αὐτὸς ἔφη. But for me, who cannot allow it to any in matters which I am able to examine, and who should think myself obliged to give my reasons even for agreeing with him in all such matters, it seems still more incumbent upon me to give those which induce me to differ from him; and I shall do so, without repeating much of what has been said by me already.

I have said in the former Essay, and I have given my reasons for it, that I do not believe mankind discerned the unity of God in the first dawnings of knowledge. But the impressions of the Creator are so strongly marked in the whole extent of the creation, and the idea of an all-wise, and all-powerful Being, the first cause of all things, is so proportionable to human reason, that

that it must have been received into the minds of men, as soon as they began to contemplate the face of nature, and to exercise their reason in such contemplations; and this was long before the commencement of any traditions that we find, out of the books of Moses. Profane memorials show us the whole world and sacred memorials; except the patriarchs and the Israelites alone out of this dark scene, involved in polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. But still, both sacred and profane concur in showing us some gleams of light, that break through these clouds, some notices of the knowledge and worship of the true God, that were kept up among the sons of men. They appear faintly, and very imperfect they were in these times, perhaps early to us, though late with respect to the beginning of our mundane and human system. But still they appear, and give us sufficient reason, to collect from their appearances much more than they show us immediately.

It is strange to observe how unwilling ecclesiastical writers and divines are to admit this truth; and it is often provoking to observe, that they, who have no more pretence to be believed about their own religion than the heathen writers about theirs, presume to contradict what the latter of these affirm about their faith, in opposition to the invectives of Christian writers, though they appeal to the ancient doctors of paganism, whom they do not appear to have interpolated, nor under whose names there is no pretence to say

that they have imposed any spurious books on the world; both which accusations are evidently true of our Christian writers, in the first, and, as we commonly say, the purest ages of christianity. It is stranger still to observe how little regard the same persons pay, upon this head, even to the opinions of the greatest saints, and most learned men of their own church. I could quote many instances. Let one suffice. It shall be taken from St. Austin, who, answering a passage of Faustus the Manichæan*, wherein he makes the belief of one Supreme Being the common badge of Pagans, Jews, and Christians, does not allow, indeed, that the Christians took the opinion of a divine monarchy from the heathens, but is forced to allow, that these were not so given up to false gods, as to lose the belief of the one true God, from whom every kind of nature proceeds†.

The polytheism, superstition, and idolatry of Egypt, appear so monstrous in the light in which we view them, that they furnish the principal topicks of every declamation against the theology of paganism; and yet I persuade myself, that the knowledge and worship of God in his unity had prevailed even there in times unknown to us. Let it be considered, that the Greeks, through whom all our profane anecdotes concerning this

* Lib. 20.

† —— Gentes non usque adeo ad falsos deos esse dilapsas, ut opinionem amitterent unius veri Dei, ex quo est omnis qualiscunque natura.

country

country have been conveyed, were not much acquainted with it, nor had resorted to it in search of knowledge till the reign of Psammiticus, that is, till seventeen or eighteen centuries after the establishment of this monarchy, dating this establishment only from Menes, and bringing him down as low as he is dragged by Marsham. Thales, Solon, and Pythagoras, went thither nearly about the same time, in the reign of Crœsus at soonest, or in that of Cambyses at latest. By this chronology it appears, that an immense space of time, sufficient for many revolutions in religion and government, was elasped before the Greeks had the means of being well informed about either; and the antiquities of Egypt might be as obscurely and imperfectly seen by these first philosophers who went thither, as the Greek antiquities are by us. We may push this consideration farther, and suppose, that the same polytheism, superstition, and idolatry, that they found established in Egypt, were established there in the time of Orpheus, six or seven hundred years before, or even in the time of Cecrops, Cadmus, Danaus, or Erectheus, who are said to have carried colonies, letters, and civil institutions, into Greece, two or three hundred years sooner than Orpheus carried religious rites and mysteries thither; and there will remain, still, behind all these events, an antiquity more than sufficient for one revolution in theological opinions, and in religious worship at least, and perhaps for more than one.

'I am willing to grant more than Eusebius, or any one else has proved, and yet this concession will only thrust the æra of Egyptian polytheism and idolatry back into a greater antiquity. It will not give any grounds to assert, like Eusebius, that the Egyptians were polytheists and idolaters, or professed a sort of religious atheism from the beginning, nor that the Israelites alone knew and worshipped the true God. It may lead us, perhaps, to opinions very opposite to these, and much better founded on profane, for I shall not yet consider the sacred authority that is alleged for them, and that is more so in appearance than reality. The more ancient the establishment of polytheism and idolatry in Egypt is agreed to have been, the stronger the argument grows, that may be drawn from those notices, that we have in our most authentick accounts of Egyptian theology, of a purer faith and worship. The belief of one supreme, invisible, and incomprehensible Being, Creator of all things, must have been once firmly settled in the minds of the people, when so many ages of prevalent polytheism and idolatry were not able to root it out, nor to efface the traces of the worship of him. Publick profession and practice, the outward system of religion, was altered, and the purity of it corrupted many ways, and by different motives. But nothing except conviction could have preserved, from time immemorial, in the secret theology or inward doctrine of the Egyptians, this fundamental article of all true religion, the existence of one Supreme Being, Creator, and

Monarch

Monarch of the universe, and this article was so preserved. Whatever errours the Egyptians, or their scholars, the Greeks, admitted into their theology, this opinion tinctured every theistical system: and even they who held the world to be eternal, like Aristotle and others, held the world, and the deified parts of it to be so, not as self-existent, but as eternal effects of an eternal cause. Aristotle argues in his metaphysicks against the folly of supposing more principles than one; and nothing can be more express than the doctrine of Plotinus on this point, where he distinguishes between priority in the order of time, and priority in the order of nature, and makes the world coæval with God, no otherwise than as light is conceived to be coæval with the sun.

The belief of one Supreme Being may appear the more evidently to have been that of the Egyptians, publickly professed in the most ancient times of that monarchy, and held at all times in their secret theology, from this consideration, that it was brought from thence by the first of the Greeks, who went thither for instructions, and that the same doctrine was held by the last of those who had studied this philosophy. Thales, and Pythagoras, to say nothing of Plato here, who came long after, brought it into Greece, disguised indeed under hieroglyphical and mystical representations, but yet too plainly taught to be mistaken for the contrary doctrine. Anaxagoras made a more publick use of it by his writings, and has gone away with the honour of being the first of the Greeks who introduced a nous, or mind, into

into the cosmopœia. But Thales was of the same opinion as Anaxagoras; and Eusebius quotes very unfairly what this philosopher said of water, as of the first principle of all things, without making any mention of that intelligence, who framed all things of water, according to Thales *. This notion of a fluid chaos, which we know to have been very general, by Plutarch and by other authorities, was very Mosaical too, and points up to an Egyptian original. The founder of the Ionick sect had it from thence most certainly, and Moses too, if we give any credit to Simplicius, who scrupled not to declare, as I find him quoted by Dr. Cudworth, that the passages in the first of Genesis about the creation of the world were taken from Egyptian traditions. He called them fabulous, because he was a zealous assertor of the eternity of the world. But his authority will not make them pass for such. Moses, who had been instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, might believe them true upon much better grounds. Nay, more, he might be directed, if you please, by inspiration to take from them his belief of the beginning of things. Upon the whole it is plain, that the Supreme Being, the maker of the world, was acknowledged by the Egyptian theology at the first period that has been mentioned.

To prove that the same doctrine was derived from the same source, by the last of those who

* Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

applied

applied themselves to the study of Egyptian theology, I shall content myself to bring Jamblicus forward; a very mysterious writer indeed, and yet plain enough to establish what we contend for. He answers the questions Porphyry had asked of Anebo, under the name of Abammon, the master of Anebo. He was a Syrian, a very learned man, and much more capable, probably, than any Egyptian of that age, to give a body of their divinity. Now we learn by the eighth section of the book he wrote on this occasion, that the Egyptian philosophy supposed a multitude of essences, as they expressed themselves, and a multitude of different principles of these essences; from whence I am apt to think, that Pythagoras borrowed his numbers, and Plato his ideas. They carried their inquiries beyond all the bounds of human knowledge, and they disputed, as we do now, about words. But still it is manifest, that these essences, or principles, were deemed subordinate to the first cause; for before them all, and before their first god and king, the sun, they acknowledged a Being, the fountain of all being, the root of all intelligible ideas. From this Being proceeded, according to this theology, "explicuit se" in Gale's translation, that Being who is his own father, sufficient to himself, the God of gods, the Father of essences, from whom all existence flows. This was the doctrine which Mercurius Trismegistus taught, and these were the principles he placed before the æthereal, empyreal, and celestial deities, concerning whom he wrote

wrote a great number of volumes. That this is a rhapsody of nonsense, I agree most readily. But it may not be less genuine for that, and it is sufficient for my purpose; since it establishes the unity of God even more precisely, and less mysteriously, than the Athanasian creed.

That Greek metaphysical refinements helped to render the Egyptian theology less intelligible, I shall not controvert; though he must pass for a dogmatical pedant, who presumes to affirm, that they did so, and pretends to be a competent judge of the matter. But sure I am, that the orthodoxy of it, in this great point, is better proved by this quotation from Jamblicus, than the supposed monstrous heterodoxy of it by any authority Eusebius brings to justify his charge. He affirms, very positively, in the third book of his Evangelical Preparation, that no other gods, beside the stars, were acknowledged, even in the hidden theology of the Egyptians; that the creation of the universe was ascribed to the visible sun alone, and all things depended, according to it, on fatal necessity, and on the influence of the stars, without the intervention of any incorporeal being, any efficient reason, God, gods, or invisible intelligent natures. To maintain this stout assertion, he quotes a fragment of Porphyry's letter to Anebo, and triumphs much in it, though it makes nothing to his purpose. It proves, that Chæremon and some other writers had induced Porphyry to doubt concerning this article of the Egyptian creed, and that he writ to this priest to be

be informed of the truth. Chæremon was an Egyptian, and had been a priest, as Anebo was; for neither the comick poet, nor any other of that name, can be the person intended, as it seems to me. Porphyry might possibly know nothing more of him. His authority, therefore, appeared sufficient to make Porphyry inquire. But it was not sufficient to make Eusebius affirm, in flat contradiction to so many better authorities, and even to his own in other places. This Chæremon, I believe, was he who had accompanied Ælius Gallus in his voyage from Alexandria higher up into Egypt, and had been derided for his ignorance and arrogance by the whole company. Strabo had been one of this company, and Eusebius had read the seventeenth book of his geography, without doubt, wherein an account is given of this important person. It is shameful, therefore, to see him quoted for the true notions of Egyptian theology. There were some philosophers and learned men in Egypt, very probably, in the time of Chæremon. But the colleges of those ancient philosophers, under whom Eudoxus and Plato had studied, were deserted; or, if they remained, they were become seminaries of priests, who took care of sacrifices, performed the other rites of superstition, exercised all the craft of their order, and took no pains to improve themselves and others in knowledge. Eusebius should have remembered, that, if Chæremon's authority was good against the Egyptians, it was of some force and weight against the Jews, which he

would have been as unwilling to admit as Josephus, who accused Chæremon for this reason of imposture; unless he had avowed in this case a maxim, which he and Josephus have done little else than avow in others, that the same testimony is good when it makes for them, and bad when it makes against them. Eusebius should have remembered, when he derided the comment of Porphyry on the verses attributed to Orpheus, and when he asked, how the author, whoever he was, could sing of God, or mean that efficient mind that created the universe, who had never heard of any such doctrine? He should have remembered, I say, that he begged the question, and supposed what he had not proved against the Pagans.

It has been observed already, that the unity of a Supreme Being must have been once a first principle of Egyptian religion, since it pierced through such an immense series of polytheism, superstition, and idolatry. Here we may observe to the same purpose, that all the metaphysical and theological refinements of Egypt and Greece were not able to remove this angular stone of true theism. When metaphysicks and theology are made sciences, and these sciences become the professions of orders of men, who increase their consideration in the world, or advance their temporal interests by creating an appearance of mystery where there is none, or by increasing it where it is, the simplicity of religion will be lost of course, and natural theology will be

be transformed into artificial. We may find examples to confirm this truth in the Christian system; and I much doubt whether the Evangelists would understand the Epistles of St. Paul, though one of them was his scribe, or St. Paul the works of St. Austin, though the saint took so much of his theology from the apostle. This happened in the Egyptian system of religion; but this fundamental article, the unity of God, was preserved, though darkened and perplexed by the engraftments made upon it. Such were those which may be found in Plato, and in the latter Platonicians; such were those which I have, and others which I might have cited from Jamblicus. But in all of them the existence of a Supreme Being, the Being of beings, the God of gods, the Fountain of all existence, the Root of all intelligible ideas, was acknowledged.

May one not think, without being too hypothetical, that we see, in the anecdote Plutarch* relates concerning the belief and worship of the people of the Theban dynasty, the last stage of orthodox faith, and of natural religion in Egypt? They adored the one God, eternal, invisible, not like to any visible object, nor to be represented by them. I use Mr. Locke's words, for if he had intended to describe this faith and worship from Plutarch, he could not have done it more exactly; and yet this is the description of that God, who was not known, according to him, till the

* De Iside & Osiride.

light

light of the Gospel manifested him to the world. He might have asserted just as truly, that no men but the Jews knew how to read and write, before the coming of Christ, because many of them knew ill, as they do to this day, and some of them did not know it at all.

At what time the true God was thus publickly known and worshipped in the Upper Egypt, it is impossible to determine. But we see in the history ascribed to Moses, that he was known in the Lower Egypt, and the neighbouring country of the Canaanites in the days of Abraham. The adventures of this patriarch and his son, when their wives were taken from them, are told in several chapters of Genesis a little confusedly, but however they serve to establish this fact. No man, who reads the twentieth chapter of Genesis, can doubt, whether it was the true God or not, of whom the author meant to speak, and who appears to the first of the Abimelechs in his sleep. It has been said, I know, on this occasion, that God manifested himself sometimes to those who were not in his alliance or covenant, but that he did this always for the sake of his own people. He did it then, at this time, to preserve Sarah's chastity. Be it so. But still he manifested himself on this important occasion. The king of Gerar knows him, and appeals to his justice. God is pleased to declare, that the king's intentions were not criminal, and that he had therefore kept him from the commission of the sin; a very unnecessary restraint, surely, since the king did

did not intend to commit it, since his intentions were not criminal. God commands, the king obeys, Abraham intercedes, and Abimelech is restored to the power of begetting, and his wife and his concubines to the power of conceiving children. The same, or which is most likely, some other Abimelech had taken warning, and therefore as soon as he knew that Rebecca was the wife of Isaac, he threatened death to any man who should presume to lie with her, and bring so great a sin on him and his people. He followed Isaac to Bersabea, and there this king, his minister, and his general, desired to make a solemn league with him, because they knew that the Lord was with him*. The reason they gave, to induce him to consent, was not only, that they had done no hurt to him, nor his, but that they had sent him from Gerar, with the blessing of the Lord †. Is the true God pointed more directly out any where in the same book? Do not the Abimelechs acknowledge him, and conduct themselves, on this occasion, as one of the patriarchs might have done?

Melchisedech must not be forgot in this place. A thousand idle guesses have been made, and various fables invented about him. St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Hebrews, shows great cabalistical skill on this subject, and grounds on such forced allusions, as might pass in the school of

* Tecum esse Dominum.

† Dimissimus auctum benedictione Domini. Gen. vi, 26.

Gamaliel, the least conclusive reasoning that was ever heard out of it. The book of Genesis says little of this king and priest, but enough to show, that the true God was known to others beside the Jewish line of patriarchs, and before the Israelites were a people. He was of Egyptian race, as some have asserted, without any grounds, I believe, of history or tradition, but not without an air, at least, of probability, In all cases, he was priest of the most high God, as well as king of Salem. As such he blessed Abraham; as such the father of the faithful received his blessing; as such he paid him the tithes of his plunder, which is a title, by the way, for carrying the divine right of tithes farther than the moderation of the church has hitherto carried it*. Since he was a priest of the true God, as well as king of Salem, or Jerusalem, are we to believe that his subjects were all idolaters? The supposition cannot be reconciled to common sense; and since it cannot, sure I am, that the propositions I combat cannot be so; nay I have the authority of the Bible on my side. I shall have it so again before I have done.

If I would proceed now, as learned men presume to do very frequently, and without the least scruple, I might venture to affirm, on these foundations, a little extended and improved, not only,

* What is here said, is said on the authority of St. Paul; for if we believe Moses, it may be, that Melchisedech paid tithes to Abraham.

that

that the true God was known by the Egyptians, and by some of the people of Palestine before the vocation of Abraham, but, that this patriarch, who became the father of the faithful, though said to have been bred an idolater, learned this orthodox faith in Egypt, and the neighbouring countries, if he was so bred in his own. But I am not scholar enough to presume to affirm on wild conjecture. I dare go no farther than sufficient probability leads me, and sufficient vouchers support me. With these on my side, I might go on to show, that the unity of the Supreme God was taught both by the Chaldeans and the Magi, and might rest on the proofs brought by Cudworth, in his Intellectual System; by Hyde, in his Treatise concerning the Religion of the Ancient Persians, and by other authors, leaving criticks, who are not able to subvert the systems of these writers, to nibble at some particular circumstances. But I choose to leap at once to the extremity of the East, and to show by anecdotes less common, that a nation, lately known, had, in as great, or even a greater antiquity, the same faith.

The nation I mean is the Chinese, who will not be suspected, one would think, of having had any communication with the Israelites, though I would not answer for such antiquaries as Huetius, nor others of that stamp. The Chinese have their Pentateuch as well as the Jews, and one volume of it is as old as Fohi, the founder of their empire. Two other volumes contain records as old, at least, as the deluge, and the two last are

collections from other ancient monuments published by Confucius, who lived six hundred years before Christ, and was therefore elder than Esdras. The Chinese scholars, as proud of the antiquity of their nation as ever any of those who disputed formerly about theirs could be, might disregard our most ancient traditions, and look on Moses as a modern historian. They might found their incredulity, and their positiveness, on their ignorance; which is the general case of bigots in the West, as well as in the East. But for us, who have the happiness to live in this enlightened age, and who pretend to examine every thing, and to judge according to evidence, we should have no good grace to reject the classical books of the Chinese. They come to us upon as good original authority as that of the Jews; they contain as few things that are repugnant to the general observation and experience of mankind as any other ancient records, and much fewer than some; and they have been preserved in a manner that gives them a singular authenticity, into which I will not enter, because it would lead me far, and might cause some invidious comparisons*.

This authenticity is so well established, that the atheists in China are forced to submit to it, and though their advantage would be to reject these books, they endeavour, by all the artifice of sophistry, to drag a meaning out of them, which

* Vid. Scien. Sin. &c.

may

may seem to set the opinion of antiquity on their side. The ancient sages among the Chinese, like those of other nations, delivered their doctrines in short apophthegms, in parables and allegories. They who followed were not so laconick, but even they dealed much in figure; and allegory allegorising allegory very often by way of explanation, the sense, which was at first obscure, grew to be worse than obscure. It grew to be litigious. The paraphrases and commentaries multiplied, the disputes increased, and the labour on every side has been to confirm different and opposite opinions, by different expositions of the same text. The language, as well as genius, of this people has helped to increase the confusion, not so much indeed as if these books had passed through several languages, but still a great deal from the scarcity of words, and the necessity of supplying this defect, when they speak, by numberless inflections and tones of voice, and when they write by numberless points and accents.

A Jesuit, who restored the mission in the last century, after it had been some time interrupted by the authority of the government, took a method which it is to the present purpose to mention. He engaged in the dispute that was carried on between the theists and the atheists, and maintained, in concert with the former, that the ancient Chinese believed and worshipped one God. This God, the God of their fathers, denied by some, forgot by more, and almost unknown, he declared to be the God, whose reve-

lation and whose will he came to publish among them. Neither he, nor those who followed him, have made many real converts to christianity, nor persuaded that people to believe, that his religion was in former times established among them, though many pious frauds have been employed for that purpose. But in the other parts, there has been less difficulty, and more success, for the state of the dispute seems to have stood thus.

A being called Xam Ti, which words signify the Supreme King, appears in all their ancient books to have been worshipped as the dispenser of temporal good and evil to mankind. Fohi offered victims, and Hoam Ti built a temple to this divinity. From this time, that is from an æra anterior to any of ours, the same worship continued, together with rigorous rites practised in honour of inferior spirits*, who are sometimes called the ministers of the Supreme King, and who are said by one of the interpreters of Confucius, to exercise their offices "in hoc cœli et "terræ medio," to bring blessings on the good, and punishments on the wicked. The book Xu Kim says expressly, that their great emperor and legislator Xun sacrificed to Xam Ti, and to the six principal spirits. Another classical book mentions a very ancient edict, by which all the people are commanded to pay honour to the Supreme Emperor of Heaven, and likewise to the spirits, that the spirits may intercede for the hap-

* Vid. Confucius.

piness

piness of the people, "ut pro populo flagitarent "felicitatem." Such passages, and a multitude of others to the like effect, are found in the ancient books of the Chinese, as we learn from the Jesuits, from whom alone we can have any tolerable information; and it should seem, that such authorities were sufficient to decide the controversy, and to leave no doubt whether the ancient people of this country believed a God, or were atheists. But the men of letters among them, at this time, profess a sort of Spinozism, to which they endeavour to reconcile these passages; and there are many examples in the "Scientia "Sinica" of the extravagant paraphrases they make for this purpose.

The atheists insist, and the theists admit, that the word Tien, which signifies Heaven, is frequently used now, and was so anciently, as synonymous to the words Xam Ti. What the atheists would infer from thence is obvious, but by no means conclusive. Their forefathers imagined, as I believe all the ancient people of the world did, and as almost all the people of the world do still, that the habitation of God, and all celestial beings, was above that canopy which appeared to be spread over their heads, and which they called Heaven. From hence the custom arose of employing the word which signifies the place of residence, for the word that denotes the Being who is supposed to reside in it. But the argument, that results from the promiscuous use of these words, will turn, according to my appre-

hension, directly against the use which the atheist would make of it. If the ancient Chinese had acknowledged no higher principle than matter and form, no supreme intelligent Being, the words Xam Ti, far from being used as synonymous to the word Tien, would never have come into use at all. A man who should say at Pekin, China declared war against the Tartars, or, the Emperor of China did so, would speak as intelligibly as a man at London would do, who should say Great Britain, or the king of Great Britain, declared war against France. But the same manner of speaking cannot obtain in a country that has neither emperor nor king; and no Dutchman ever said, indifferently, this Holland did, or this the king of Holland did. This argument must be the stronger in the mouths of Chinese theists; because, in the same books wherein the words we have mentioned are thus used, the separate existence of the spirits of mountains, rivers, and cities, and of the seasons, the sun, the moon, and the planets, is taught; and yet these separate spirits, and the things over which they preside, are spoken of with the same licence. They are called, indifferently, the spirit of the mountain, or of the river, and the mountain or the river; nay, the very same words that are employed to signify the fortifications of a city, are employed to signify the tutelary spirits of that city. On the whole we may conclude, that a Supreme Being was known to the ancient Chinese, though superstition, idolatry, and atheism, have been so prevalent

valent among that people since. The sacrifices performed with so much order and pomp, so much reverence and religious awe, the fasts, the purifications, and the other acts of divine worship which were practised, were not performed and practised surely in honour of matter and form, nor directed to these vague ideas of the human mind. The empresses, who nourished silkworms, and weaved ornaments for the altars; the emperors, who ploughed and sowed annually, and raised, by the sweat of their brows, the fruits of the earth, which they offered on those altars, acknowledged, without doubt, some other divinity than Tai Kie, and Li. Thus we must think, unless we can be as absurd as Eusebius, and figure to ourselves a sort of religious atheists, who, acknowledging no deity beside dead and senseless matter, yet worshipped it, invoked it, and implored it's assistance. But this sottishness and contradictious nonsense Cudworth cannot believe incident to human nature*, and I presume to think, that most men will be of the same mind.

SECT. II.

THE particular proofs that have been brought, or to which I have referred in this and the foregoing Essay, are sufficient to destroy the credit of the assertions to which they are opposed. But

* Intell. System.

it

it may be proper to show farther, that if there were no such particular proofs of the acknowledgment of the one true God by other nations beside the Israelites, yet the assumption that he was acknowledged by them alone, and that all other nations were polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, would deserve to be rejected for it's absurdity; since it will be found inconsistent with the tenour of the Mosaical history, when we take Scripture for our guide, and with all the rules of judgment that observation, experience, and good sense suggest to us, when we consider the human character, and the course of human affairs. I am not surprised, when I meet in Bochart with such an assertion as this boldly advanced, that "there was no church before the "deluge, except in the family of Seth;" and, that after the deluge, "till the coming of Christ, God "made himself known to no people, except to "those who were of the race of Shem*." But when I meet with such assertions as I have quoted from Mr. Locke, in an author who lays aside the comments and systems of divines, and betakes himself to the sole reading of the Scriptures, I confess myself surprised, to the last degree, at the weakness of the strongest minds.

We have nothing to do, here, with the antediluvian world. We leave the ecclesiastical history of it to Bochart, and the natural to Burnet. But if we consult the Bible for what passed after

* Geog. Sac. l. 1, c. 1.

the

the deluge, and is to our present purpose, we shall find, that the knowledge of the one true God, derived to Noah from Adam by uninterrupted succession, and confirmed to him by many particular revelations, must have been common to him, and to his family, as much as those particular precepts which he is said to have received from the mouth of God, and which are called "præcepta Noachidarum." The sons of Noah, therefore, when they dispersed themselves to repeople the world, must have carried their knowledge with them, and have communicated it to their descendants in all the settlements they made, and in all the colonies that were propagated from these.

This is so evident, that it would suffer no dispute in any similar case; and yet, for reasons not hard to find, nor proper to avow, it is denied in this. Lactantius says*, that Ham, the son of Noah, settled in Arabia, and that having not received the worship of God by tradition from his father, the nation he founded was the first that knew not God. A strange assertion, indeed, and such a one as cannot be true, if the sacred history be so. We read there †, that the patriarch, lying drunk and naked in his tent, and this ungracious son seeing him in that indecent condition, he told it to his brothers; that Shem and Japhet went reverently backwards, saw not their

* De Orig. Er. c. 4. † Gen. ix.

father's

father's nudity, and threw a cloak over him*. After this, Noah pronounced the prophetical curse against Canaan, the son of Ham, who was to be the servant of the servants of his brothers †; and this prophecy, it is said, by Bochart and others, had it's completion when the Canaanites were subdued by the Israelites. But whatever criticisms, good or bad, may be made on it, and whatever reflection the punishment of Canaan, who had no share in his father's crime, may suggest, this gave the Israelites the sole title they had to the land of promise, by the grant God made of it to the posterity of Abraham, and was employed to justify all the cruelties they exercised on the Canaanites.

This unfortunate person was not only punished in his race, as the prophecy threatened, but his name and memory are cruelly persecuted to this day by the unrelenting wrath of Jewish and Christian writers. Some have accused him of gelding his father, and some of committing incest with his mother. He was banished, they say, to the scorching climate of Africa, and the colour of his posterity is a lasting monument of the blackness of his crimes. He not only preserved and propagated the necromancy, which he had learned of the lascivious angels before the deluge‡, but he became himself an object of idolatry, as he had

* —— Patris virilia non viderunt.

† —— Servus servorum erit fratribus suis.

‡ Bochart Geog. Sac. l. 4, c. 1.

been

been an idolater, and was worshipped under the name of Jupiter Hammon. They who can believe all this, may believe that polytheism and idolatry were established immediately after the deluge; but they who are not quite so credulous, will see, that such opinions are irreconcilable to the Scriptures and to common sense. Noah might be as angry as he pleased with his reprobate son, and might conceal from him as many traditions as he could, yet, still, this son had been an eye-witness of the deluge; he had been saved, with the rest of the family, in the ark; he had assisted his father, without doubt, in building it, and in making all the other preparations for that great catastrophe, as well as for the renewal of the species of animals, and the restoration of things afterward. Is it possible to conceive, that he should not have heard, while they floated together over the drowned world, who that God was, by whose power it was drowned, and what those crimes were, which had drawn this astonishing destruction on mankind? It is impossible. His father could not conceal this knowledge from him. Ham knew the one true God most certainly, and had often joined in the worship of him. He could no more be ignorant of God, than he could be of the deluge.

This is so very plain, that it cannot be directly, nor generally denied, whatever expressions may be sometimes used by men whom learning emboldens, and zeal is apt to transport. But then the chronology, founded on the genealogies in the

Book of Genesis, supposes the tradition of these revelations, by which God communicated himself to man, to have been preserved so little a time after the deluge, that it gives a colour to suppose all the nations of the world, nay, even the descendants of Shem, ignorant of the one true God; and on this assumption, presumptuous dogmatical persons, who affect to be in the whole secret of divine œconomy, establish the reason, that they assign by another assumption, for the election and separation of the posterity of Abraham from all other people. Infinite Wisdom, it seems, could contrive no other expedient for continuing the primitive faith and worship; for such that of the one true God was, by these accounts, among the descendants of one family, that had repeopled the Earth, except this of reviving them, and continuing them by such a series of revelations and miracles among one people, as would have made any revival of them unnecessary among any other; because they would have been more than sufficient to continue them uncorrupted over the whole world, not only till the vocation of Abraham four hundred years after the deluge, not only till the coming of the Messiah, two thousand years after that, but even to this hour, and to the consummation of all things.

Some place the æra of idolatry precisely at Serug, who was three generations older than Abraham. Sir John Marsham thinks it a very proper date *. A probable one I am sure it is

* Can. Chron. Sac. 4.

not,

not, nor indeed a proper one for any purpose, except that of making mankind idolaters just in time for introducing the vocation of Abraham. This might render it proper for Eusebius, Epiphanius, and all the tribe of Jews and Christians, who have employed every literary artifice to confine the knowledge and worship of God to the chosen seed, and to represent them as the sole object of providential care for twenty centuries. But I think, that the learned and judicious chronicler has not deserved to be ranked among this partial and collusive tribe. We might call them the blind tribe too, since they must not have seen, unless you suppose, that they saw, but depended on the blindness of a then ignorant world, that this knowledge and worship could not have been as confined as they suppose it from the time of the flood, unless God had, by one continued miracle, concealed himself to establish the kingdom of the devil, and altered the very nature of things, to make so important, so universal, so indisputable a tradition die before it's time, and, as we may say, at once.

When the same persons attempt to establish the credibility of the Mosaical history, they do not insist alone upon the divine inspiration of the author, but upon the ordinary means that he had of knowing, with the greatest certainty, all that we find related in the Pentateuch. These means were the traditions, which they suppose to have come fresh and authentick to him through a very small number of generations, though from a very

great antiquity. Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years: and the deluge happened sixteen centuries and a half after the creation. Noah, therefore, who was born six hundred years before the deluge, had lived with those who had lived with the first of men. Noah continued alive three hundred and fifty years after the deluge, that is, within seventy-six years of the vocation of Abraham; and Shem, the son of Noah, died just as many years after this vocation. From Abraham the traditions passed to Isaac, and from him to Jacob; and all the persons who had conversed with this patriarch could not be dead in the course of a century, which intervenes between the decease of Jacob, and the birth of Moses. Thus you see, that the traditions from Adam to this legislator and historian, passed through about seven generations, and from Noah to Abraham, and his contemporaries, through one or two at most, according to this chronology.

Let us take, now, this chronology for good, whatever objections may be made to it, or how precarious soever the principles of it deserve to be esteemed. But then let us ask every man of sense and candour who receives it, whether he can persuade himself, that in the days of Abraham, about four hundred years after the deluge, nay, much sooner, in the days of Serug, the existence of that God who had destroyed and restored the world in so astonishing a manner just before, could be wholly lost in the memory of mankind? I say just before, with very good reason;

son; because the distance of three or four centuries, when the lives of men were reckoned by centuries, may be called, properly, just before. The deluge was an event as modern to Abraham, and the men of that age, as the restoration of King Charles the Second is to us of this age. Could the belief and worship of God be lost by the descendants of Shem, a hundred years before the death of Shem? Could they be lost, even, during the life of Noah? Is it possible to figure to ourselves the children of these holy patriarchs professing polytheism, and practising idolatry, under the eyes of their fathers; and Abraham, for instance, educated in the religion of the Zabians, a new name given by our learned men to the Chaldæans, after Mahometan writers, while Shem was still alive? Once more:—is it credible, in the lowest degree of credibility, that the Chaldæans, who were able to give Calisthenes, two thousand years after the flood, astronomical observations of as great a number of years at least, should know nothing of the flood, of the occasion, of the author of it; in a word, of the true God, in less than four centuries after it had happened? These improbabilities are so very monstrous, that it is marvellous any men should be hardy enough to impose them, or silly enough to believe them. When Maimonides is gravely quoted to prove Tarah an idolater, I let my book fall with astonishment. As soon would I quote Navarette, a Spanish missionary, to prove, that the first coin, of which we have any know-

 ledge,

ledge, is that made by Tarah, the father of Abraham, at the request of King Ninus, and for thirty pieces of which Judas sold his master.

I know that Joshua is introduced in the twenty-fourth chapter of the book ascribed to him, speaking in the name of God to the children of Israel, and telling them that Tarah, the father of Abraham and Nachor, had served strange gods. Now that here and there a man might begin to corrupt the worship of the true God, even in these early days, is just credible; but, that the true God should be unknown, and idolatry established, at that time, is what I affirm to be incredible. Let commentators puzzle over the text, or take the fact as they find it, without any examination, it will become other men to believe, that something has happened to the Jewish records, like that which happened to those of another ancient people, the Phœnicians; and, that if the scribes of the former have not corrupted their history, as Philo Byblius, who published a Greek translation of Sanchoniathon, in the reign of Hadrian, complains, that the priests of the latter had corrupted theirs, we may suppose, at least, as some even of the Jewish doctors have done, that the genealogies of the Bible, far from being complete, are imperfect abstracts; or that they have been compiled, as father Fouquet, at his return from China, where he had resided three and twenty years, assured me, that the chronological table in the "Scientia Sinica" had been. This table is composed of cycles of threescore years each,

and all these cycles appear to us unbroken. But the learned Jesuit averred, that in the originals many of them wanted the beginning, and many of them the end; so that the space of time to which this table refers could not be shorter, but might be immeasurably longer than the chronological table, his brethren had put together, represents it. In a word, it will become reasonable men to assume any hypothesis, rather than to believe, against universal experience, the least disputable analogy, and the plainest dictates of common sense, that the knowledge and worship of God were intirely forgot, while the preachers of both, and the eye-witnesses of the deluge, were still alive.

Let us believe, on the authority of Moses, that God, trusting neither to the impressions of himself, that are visible on the whole face of nature, nor to the reason he gave to man, communicated this knowledge, and directed this worship by immediate revelations. But let us not be so absurd as to believe, on any authority, that so many signal revelations, and astonishing miracles, attested by evidence unquestionable, and delivered down by immediate, not remote tradition, could be forgot so soon, nor that they could be remembered, and the great truths they communicated, and confirmed, be forgot. All these must have continued strongly impressed on the minds of men much longer, even in the ordinary course of things. They must have continued to be so, not only in the countries where the repeopling of the

world began, but wherever the founders of nations led their colonies from thence, which they began to do in the days of Phaleg, that is about a century after the flood. If we believe, on the authority of Moses, that God made himself known by revelations and miracles to all the men that were, at a certain time, in the world, and from whom all the nations of the world descended, we cannot believe, on the same authority, because we cannot believe consistently with it, that his being and his worship were unknown to any of these, or forgot by any of them in the course of a very few years. The same authority would be made thus to contradict itself. In the case of another history, we should say that neither might be true: but, in the case of this, we may say that both cannot. The first is a plain, independent fact, that must be reputed true on the whole, whatever disputes may arise about circumstances, or the history must be reputed fabulous: but the other depends on a chronology very liable to mistakes, and not affecting the truth of the former. That famous astronomer, Cassini, took the pains to calculate, backward, a remarkable eclipse, or two, that are mentioned in the ancient Chinese annals. He found that such eclipses had been, but the dates were not exact. Just so we find, that the one true God was eclipsed, if I may use this expression; but though the eclipse lasted long, and lasts to this hour in some parts of the world, it could not begin so early, nor spread so universally, as some men would

would induce us to believe. Will it be said, that the confusion of languages, which began at once in the plains of Sennaar, and was followed by the dispersion of mankind into all the parts of the earth, as the story is generally, though erroneously understood, interrupted or corrupted tradition, and gave occasion to the immediate establishment of polytheism and idolatry? But the argument to be drawn from this famous event will prove the very contrary. Though languages were confounded, memory was not destroyed, and the knowledge which had been common to all men while they lived together, and formed but one community, was continued, and delivered down in different languages after this division. The knowledge was dispersed, as those who had it were dispersed; and the same truths were taught then, as they are now, in different tongues. Nay, farther, this very confusion and the dispersion of mankind, which were brought about in so miraculous a manner, and by an immediate act of the same omnipotent Being who had so lately destroyed, and now restored the world, would have become, if this had been the case, the strongest confirmations imaginable of the truths that were known before; and, with the renewal and confirmation of these truths in their minds, the sons of men would have settled themselves in several countries, and have given beginnings to the several nations. Among these, therefore, and in opposition to truths so well known, and so signally confirmed, it was not possible, that the

Zabians, and the Magians, and every other sect of idolaters should arise, till, by a long tract of time, and a multitude of revolutions in the affairs of mankind, true primitive traditions, and genuine theism began to decay together. Then, and not till then, might priestcraft prevail, which Mr. Locke esteems an obstacle to the progress of true religion, and which, I believe, on principles founded in the Mosaical history, to have been the great corrupter of it after it had been established. I might easily illustrate and confirm these opinions, which are both true relatively to different times, and different places, by examples drawn from history, and even from the experience of our own age, from what passes in countries where the propagation of Christianity is attempted by missions, and in those where this religion is already established.

Something stronger than this may be objected to me. It may be said, that while I argue on probable reasons, and endeavour to show, that the true God, and the true worship of him, could not be forgot, nor polytheism and idolatry be established, as soon as they are said to have been, among the nations of the world, I do not enough consider what passed among God's chosen people, in instances where no supposition of anachronism will help me to evade the force of Scripture authority. Some pert divine may bid me descend a little lower in the history of the Bible, and learn there, how short the duration was, even among this people, of those impressions which

reve-

revelations and miracles should have rendered permanent, and almost indelible, according to me, even among the other people of the world who were left to walk in their own ways. I do so again, as I have done already often, and I find that the posterity of Abraham, or the children of Israel, as they were called, after that some mysterious person or other had changed the name of Jacob, who worsted him at wrestling, into that of Israel, I say, I find that they were become idolaters before their deliverance out of Egypt; confirmed, hardened idolaters, and so accustomed to the manners, and wedded to the superstitions of the Egyptians, that however Moses drew them forth as a separate people, there seemed to be, as Eusebius* himself confesses it happened he knew not how, no perceivable difference between them and the Egyptians. This may well appear the more surprising, if it be true, according to the common reckoning, that Jacob died less than two centuries before the Exode, that Joseph died about fifty years after his father, and that Levi had not been dead so long when Aaron was born, and Moses after him. How this could happen, neither Eusebius was able to account, nor is any man else. Dr. Spencer† takes pains to prove the fact; and it is something odd to see the authority of Eusebius and Theodoret, of Maimonides and R. Juda, superfluously employed to

* Præp. Evan. l. 7, c. 8.

† De Leg. Heb. Rit. l. 1.

confirm what the Bible had proved, in several places, to his hand. But when he goes about to reconcile the fact to some notion of reasonable probability, he succeeds still worse, and does as much too little, as he had done more than enough. The learned writer thinks, that if this people had been treated in a better manner by the Egyptians, they could, however, have hardly avoided taking up the barbarous manners of that nation to which they had been so long accustomed. But he argues, "à fortiori," that this was inevitable, because they endured a cruel servitude in Egypt, and because such a servitude renders men little attentive to religious matters, and disposes them to conform to the manners and genius of their masters *. Now the very reverse of this maxim, and this reasoning, seems to me to be true. The fear of stripes may produce, while it continues, such a conformity in outer show; but it can dispose men, inwardly, to embrace the manners and opinions, religious or others, of their tyrants, no more than it can dispose them to love their persons; and even the appearance of such a conformity will cease whenever the slavish estate ceases. It will not only cease, but the slaves, become freemen, will throw off every badge of their slavery, and prefer the manners and opinions of those especially by whom they are deli-

* Tam servilis autem, et infelix vivendi conditio, hominum animos angustos reddere solet, rerum cœlestium curâ vacuos, et in dominorum suorum mores et ingenia pronos. Ibid.

vered, to such as they professed through fear, when they were under the lash of their task-masters, "pugnis fustibusque sævientes *." Tyranny may make hypocrites, it can never make proselytes. Whoever has studied the human nature, and been careful to observe the course of human affairs, must think it repugnant to both, not only, that the Israelites should forget the traditions of their fathers, and the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, in so short a time, but that they should have been as much wedded to idolatry as the Egyptians themselves were.

But if this be strange, it is stranger still to observe how little effect revelations of publick notoriety, occasional and constant, or standing miracles before the Exode, at the Exode, in the wilderness, in the promised land, under their judges, and under their kings, had on the same people. They forgot the true God, even while he conducted them visibly through the desert. They revolted from him while the peals of thunder, that proclaimed his descent on the mountain, rattled in their ears, and while he dictated his laws to them. All the power that omnipotence could exert was not sufficient to revive, in the minds of this stubborn generation, the faith and piety of their fathers, nor a due and lasting sense of that religion which they had certainly followed, for some time at least, after their settlement in Egypt; and Dr. Spencer, therefore, might have termed

* Ibid.

their

their manners barbarous, with much more reason than he applied that epithet to those of the Egyptians*. As the means of conviction, and the motives of submission to the religion that Moses instituted, continued, and increased, so did the indocility and apparent incredulity of this elect people. Neither the promises nor the threatenings, the rewards nor the punishments, by which God endeavoured to attach them to himself, neither his condescension in wearing their crown, and in governing them like an earthly monarch, till they deposed him, nor his constant residence even after his deposition among them, could succeed. They were proof against miracles to such a degree, that there would not have been more room for surprise if we had been told, that Noah and his family served strange gods even in the ark, than there is to find, in the history of this people, that they revolted back to idolatry nine hundred years together on every occasion. This history, in short, contains many particular miracles which operated effectually against the ordinary course of nature, physical and moral, and at the same time the whole thread of it is a system of miracles, ineffectually operated, for a purpose so natural, that every one of them seems to make the next unnecessary.

If the divine now should ask me, after all that

* Israelitas, sub prima incolatûs Ægptiaci tempora, scientiæ divinæ lampada à patribus acceptam habuisse, et religionem avitam integram et illibatam diu tenuisse, nobis facilè persuadeamus. Ibid.

I have owned in favour of his argument, whether that which happened at, and after the Exode, might not happen after the deluge; whether the families that repeopled the earth at this period, might not forget the true God and his worship immediately after it, notwithstanding any traditions, as we see that God's chosen and favourite people did, during their bondage in Egypt, and as they continued to do very frequently from that time till the Babylonian captivity, notwithstanding the miraculous advertisements, and the interpositions of Providence, ever watchful to prevent these apostacies: If the divine, I say, should ask me such questions, my answer would be this. The history of the Bible tells me, that these things passed as I have presented them. But I know that they are repugnant to universal experience, and I have a conscious certainty, that they are so to the human nature. Look into the history of the world, reverend sir, and you will find too many examples of pretended revelations, of forged miracles, and of groundless traditions, that have prevailed among mankind from age to age, to leave it in your power to think that unexceptionable revelations, real miracles, and certain traditions, could be ever ineffectual. Nothing less than the greatest of all miracles could make them so, and who should work such a miracle? Not God most certainly; for those which were disappointed of their effect, you say, were wrought by him. Was it then the devil? But how came he to have such a power, and to be suffered

suffered to exert it in such a case? I know farther, most intuitively, that no creature of the same nature as I am of, and I presume the Israelites were human creatures, could resist the evidence of such revelations, such miracles, and such traditions as are recorded in the Bible. Look into yourself, reverend sir, and you will find it to be so. God appearing in all the terrours of his majesty, and his prophets denouncing judgments which were instantly, and literally fulfilled, to mention these particulars alone out of many, must have roused the most stupid, have terrified the most audacious, and have convinced the most incredulous.

Such an answer as this might procure me in return some ecclesiastical Billingsgate. I might be called infidel, deist, and, perhaps, atheist. I should be accused certainly of disbelieving the Holy Scriptures. My reply to so angry a dispute would be calm, and such as may teach charity to those who preach it so much, and practise it so "little. "Ne sævi magne sacerdos." I do not so much deny the truth of the facts related, as I oppose the application, and the use made of them. You argue from the conduct of the Israelites to that of other nations, and would persuade us, that all these might be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning; because the true God, and his worship, were forgot so soon and so often by his chosen people. But I deny, that any such analogy will hold good. The Israelites were a people set apart from the rest of mankind, and indeed

indeed so set apart, and so distinguished, that the proceedings of God toward them, and their behaviour toward God and toward man, make all together such a series of history as can be compared with no other; such a history as shows us this people, but leads us to judge by analogy of no other. In profane history we acquire experience of mankind, and human affairs. The benefit we reap from it consists in this, and by this general knowledge we judge of every particular history that we read. In sacred history we acquire none of this experience. It is the history of a people, not only set apart from the great community of mankind, but in many respects taken out, as it were, of the human system. To make the events recorded in it serve as foundations, therefore, of the judgments we pass on those that may have happened among other people, is just as absurd as it would be to make a collection of miracles, that is, of events out of the ordinary course of nature, and even repugnant to it, serve as the foundation of natural and experimental philosophy.

Let us believe then what is in the Bible, because it is there. Not like Tertullian, because it is impossible or absurd; but although it is impossible or inconsistent. At the same time let us not apply the extraordinary events, that we find there, to such as happen in the ordinary course of human affairs. Much less let us apply our own observation and experience, by which we judge very properly of other histories, to that

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of the Bible. That of the Bible must stand on the bottom of it's own authority, independently of all other; and I am persuaded, that nothing has shaken this authority more than the silly attempts of some writers to confirm it by arguments drawn from the reason of things, that is, from a comparison of ideas derived from human observation and experience. It seems to me, that divines should rest the authority, both of the Old and the New Testament, on the proofs they are able to bring of their divine original, and of the corrupt manner in which they have been conveyed down to latter ages, solely.

To establish the credit of other histories, for I consider the Bible here only as a history, it is not, indeed, sufficient to ascertain the authors of them; because these authors, being men, may have been deceived, or may have designed to deceive. For this reason their internal, as well as external proofs of authenticity are examined, and they are received or rejected, as they appear consistent or inconsistent, conformable or repugnant to the observation and experience of mankind. But this second examination is unnecessary, when the question is about the Word of God, known to be such by evidence superior to all contradiction, or it is impertinent and profane. If we could suppose the authenticity and divine original of the Scriptures destitute of sufficient external proof, this deficiency would not be supplied by all the skill of those who pretend to discover, by their superior penetration, the internal proof.

proof. If the authenticity and divine original of them be, on the contrary, sufficiently established by external proof, it is both impertinent and profane to pretend to confirm divine testimony, by showing that there is reason to believe it true. Reason has been too much employed where it has nothing to do, and too much neglected where it has most to do. Men have believed implicitly, when they should have reasoned, in laying the grounds of faith; and they have reasoned dogmatically, when they should have believed implicitly, these grounds being once laid.

A maxim has been established in theology, which may be brought to justify this proceeding against me, and the authority of St. Austin may be brought to justify the maxim. But the authority of common sense, much better than that of St. Austin, will justify me in saying, that the maxim is false. The maxim is this, that miracles themselves are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original, unless the cause for which they are wrought appears to us to be good, and therefore not till the doctrines they attest have been examined. By a parity of reason it may be said, that although the external evidence which proves the Scriptures of divine original be full in that respect, yet the internal evidence must be sought for in them, to make their authenticity complete in every respect. This maxim, and this way of reasoning were taken up, perhaps, very properly at a time when reports of miracles were easily believed, when every supposed magician was thought

thought to perform them, and when they, who would not allow the pretensions of Apollonius Thyaneus, for instance, who was opposed by the Pagans to Christ, and who was worshipped, as a God, with Christ, Abraham, and Orpheus, by the Emperor Severus, were obliged, however, to acknowledge his miracles. But the case is widely altered, and it is as improper to insist on this maxim now, as it might be proper then. We know now, that miracles, real miracles, can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify. We know, therefore, that no fact or doctrine, repugnant to the divine nature and attributes, can have been vouched by miracles, nor be taught in the Word of God: and the difference is great between rejecting any such facts, or doctrines, and the authority on which they are founded, as in the case of the Alcoran, for instance, and refusing to admit all the facts and doctrines contained in a book proved by undeniable testimony of the fact to be the Word of God; till, beside this external proof, divines have furnished the internal proofs they boast of, which are often the wildest hypotheses of imagination, and such as a doctor of Mecca would hardly frame in behalf of the Alcoran. Vain triflers! They pretend to develope the whole secret of a divine œconomy relative to man; and though it be so easy to discern what is evidently inconsistent with the divine attributes, that every reasonable man is able to discern it, yet these

these men are not stopped by such evidence. The presumptuous habits of theology carry them to talk of the plan, which they suppose Infinite Wisdom to have formed, as if they viewed it from a higher stage of intelligence and knowledge. From these whimsical paradoxes, they derived the greatest part of what they call the internal evidence of the Scriptures. On the whole it is, I hope, plain by this time, that, far from disbelieving the history of the Bible, I assert the authority of it, and endeavour to place it, out of the reach of cavil, while the divine does the contrary; for by taking the same liberty as he takes, and which every other man has the same right to take, some will pretend to find internal evidences of a human, where he pretends to find those of a divine original: and thus the authenticity of the Scriptures, instead of being once for all fixed, will be rendered by theological ostentation a matter of eternal dispute. But still I deny, that the example of the Israelites, at, and after the Exode, under their judges, and under their kings, furnishes any argument against me. All the facts contained in the Mosaical history are true; be it so, at least for argument sake: but consistently with them I may believe, nay consistently with them I cannot believe otherwise, in opposition to Mr. Locke, and to all those who went before him in asserting what he asserts, that mankind could not be polytheists and idolaters from the beginning, no, nor near the beginning, and consequently, that the belief and worship of the one

true God could not be the national religion of the Israelites alone.

Let us consider now what will result from another hypothesis. We suppose then that men acquire, without any revelations, general or particular, and by a due use of their reason, a knowledge of the one true God. That they might acquire it by these means, in former ages, cannot be denied, with any sort of modesty or candour; since we are able to demonstrate invincibly this great truth by the same means; and if they might acquire it, on what pretence can it be said that they did not? Modern philosophy has opened a more glorious prospect of the Works of God than that which the ancient nations appear to us to have had, and every new discovery adds to the magnificence of the scene, and to the force of the argument. But the great Author of Nature was always visible in every part, even the most minute, of the system of nature; and they who were far from seeing as much of it as we see, though we too are far, very far surely, from seeing the whole, might easily observe a unity of design, which pointed out most evidently the unity of that Being by whose wisdom the design was laid, and by whose power it was executed. All I assume, therefore, is, that among creatures to whom God has given sense and intellect, there have been many, at all times, who not only saw like the rest what was visible, but who discovered by reflection and contemplation what was intelligible, and yielded to the testimony God has given

given of himself. On this assumption we shall find reason to believe, that genuine theism could be, at no time, confined to any one people, and that it must have been at different times, and in different places, discovered, established, corrupted, lost, and renewed, according to the vicissitude of human affairs.

We represent the first communities of men roving about in herds, like some other animals, and such as we see many of the savage people of the world at this hour. As long as they continued in that state, the unity of God might be unknown to them, because, reason operating much more slowly, and especially in such a state, than the affections and passions of our nature, a multitude of superstitious notions, arising from ignorance and fear, could not fail to take possession of the minds of these men, and to prevent or misguide their reason. All the objects that surrounded them were new to them, and as they had not the experience of others to direct their judgment concerning the impressions which these objects made upon them, so their own experience came too late. The prejudices of superstition had rendered them unattentive to it, or unfit to make a reasonable use of it, before it came. But this could not continue, even on this hypothesis, to be long the universal state of mankind.

Nations were civilised, wise constitutions of government were framed, arts and sciences were invented and improved, long before the remotest time to which any history, or tradition extends;

and all this could not have been done without much more information of the moral and physical system of the world, and much greater efforts of human reason, than were necessary to demonstrate the first principle of true theism. Let us conclude, therefore, on grounds of the highest probability, that God was known to such as made a due use of their reason, and demonstrated by them to others, even in nations unknown to us; and since he was known, that he was worshipped; for to say he was known and not worshipped, is little less absurd than it would be to say he was worshipped and not known.

But though God was known and worshipped, it will not follow, that this knowledge and worship were preserved, or even established any where in all the purity of theism. Were they so among the Israelites, who retained so many of the rites and ceremonies, and superstitious opinions of the Lower Egypt, though they believed the unity of God, and abhorred idols, like the people of the Upper? In short, are they so at this time? Are they so among us? It has been observed in the foregoing Essay, and I have just touched the same thing in this, that the seeds of superstitious opinions and practices having been sowed before nations were formed, or governments established, it is not unreasonable to believe, that the first legislators cultivated them for political purposes. Nay, even such as were neither polytheists, nor idolaters themselves, for it is very reasonable to suppose there were some

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such, might nurse up an abundant crop of superstition by the very means by which they designed to promote true religion. This we shall not think improbable if we consult history, or if we consider it analogically to the experience of our own age. To work effects contrary to the intention of them, is a fate that attends very frequently the best of human expedients, and the reflection does no honour to our wisdom and foresight. Private ambition grew up naturally among those who intended nothing more by promoting religion, than the political purposes of government, and the enthusiasm of superstition arose still more naturally among those who promoted it, because they believed in it. Both these motives contributed to corrupt genuine theism, to disguise first, and to conceal afterward, the simplicity of natural religion, under the tinsel and the embroidery of polytheism and idolatry. From both of them proceeded so many false pretences of revelation and inspiration, the legerdemain of miracles, and such blasphemous affectations of a divine nature, or mission, as the Indian Foe, or the Arabian Mahomet imposed on a great part of mankind.

That men are capable of falling from the knowledge of the one true God into polytheism, and from a pure worship of him into idolatry and superstition, by such means as I have mentioned, and by others, whether this knowledge and this worship were communicated to them by revelation, or discovered by the use of reason as other truths are, this very reason, as well as experience, will

will evince. But the difference between the hypothesis which assumes, that the unity of the Supreme Being was taught by revelation alone, confirmed by miracles, and delivered down by tradition; and the hypothesis we go upon here, which assumes that this truth might be discovered by reason, as well as by revelation, at all times, and therefore must have been discovered at some times by those who had no other guide but reason, deserves to be considered a little more.

The proposition which affirms, that all the nations of the world, except the Israelites, were ignorant of the true God from the beginning, is, in many respects, to the last degree absurd. It implies, that the Israelites were a nation from the beginning. But were they so, if we reckon from Adam, or even from Noah, or even from the vocation of their father Abraham? If they were not so, why are they excepted as such from the beginning out of the assumed general ignorance of mankind concerning the true God? Some divines will tell us, that though God might be discovered, yet he could not be fully and certainly discovered, nor such as he is, by reason alone. That he was pleased, therefore, to discover himself by immediate revelation, not to the bulk of mankind, but to patriarchs, to prophets, and to his chosen people, both when they were a family and when they were a nation. That he has revealed himself ever since in the same manner, and to the same persons, that is to his elect, in the Scriptures; which help them, says Calvin,

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in the sixth chapter of the first book of his Institution, like spectacles, to read distinctly and clearly what others discern confusedly and imperfectly. But they who compare the ideas and notions concerning the Supreme Being that reason collects from the phænomena of nature, physical and moral, which we know to be the works of God, with those that the books of the Old Testament, which we suppose to be his word, give us, will be apt to lay these spectacles aside, and to conclude, that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, cannot be that glorious Supreme all-perfect Being whom reason showed them, and whom they discerned with their naked eyes. But again: What do these words, all the nations of the world, signify? If we understand them literally, they affirm what it is impossible the affirmers should know to be true. If we understand by them, as we are apt to do, a few nations only, such as were formed on the first repeopling of the world by Noah, and his immediate descendants, they affirm what is still more improbable. In a word, this proposition stands in the direct contradiction to the other, which is part of the same hypothesis; for if the knowledge of the true God was communicated by revelation, and propagated by the first men who were witnesses of this revelation, according to the Mosaical account, the true God must have been universally known in the beginning, and from the beginning. This needs no proof, it is selfevident; and they who will maintain, that the nations of the world were

ignorant of the true God from the beginning, with any consistency, must give up Moses; and instead of assuming such a revelation, and a tradition in consequence of it, they must admit, that all men were ignorant of the true God, till some of them discovered this great truth by philosophical observation and meditation, and communicated it to others, as it is said that Abraham did.

They may suppose, as much as they please, that the tradition was worn out, and the knowledge lost intirely, in less time than would have been sufficient to destroy the memory of the most trifling events, and the least important opinions; even this will not save their hypothesis. On the supposition of such a revelation, and of such a tradition, it would be still absurd to assert, that all the nations of the world were ignorant of the true God from the beginning; as it would be hard, on the supposition, that this knowledge was ever intirely lost among men, to account for the belief of one Supreme Being, which prevailed in the esoterical, or secret doctrines of philosophers, while their exoterical, or publick doctrines, were favourable to polytheism. All this, a general ignorance, and a particular knowledge, can be accounted for no other way than by admitting, not only, that the knowledge of one Supreme Being is to be acquired by reason, without the necessity of any revelation, or of any miracles to impose it, and that it has been so acquired in the improved, though not in the original state of mankind; but also, that it may

may be, and has been established in general and national belief, at certain times, and under the influence of favourable conjunctures, among several ancient nations. The authority of revelation, if God revealed himself to men in any other manner than by his works, being conveyed down by tradition, and this tradition being spent in a long tract of time, and by the various accidents which happened according to the course of human affairs, nothing would remain to keep up, or to renew, this belief in the minds of men. But the authority of reason ceasing to be exerted, or ceasing to prevail, reason would still remain, and be at hand to renew this belief, and propagate it again in a more happy season. Revelation descends like a torrent, and bears down all before it, while the tradition of it is fresh and strong. But this force diminishes gradually; the stream grows feeble, and ceases at last to run, by a necessity arising from the nature of things. The stream, whereof reason is the source, may be obstructed in it's course. It may creep, scarce perceived, in the same channels, or it may disappear intirely; but when it rolls no longer on the surface, it runs under ground, and is ever ready to break out anew.

Our physical and moral systems are carried round in one perpetual revolution, from generation to corruption, and from corruption to generation; from ignorance to knowledge, and from knowledge to ignorance; from barbarity to civility, and from civility to barbarity. Arts and

sciences grow up, flourish, decay, die, and return again under the same, or other forms, after periods which appear long to us, however short they may be, compared with the immense duration of the systems of created being. These periods are so disproportionate to all human means of preserving the memory of things, that, when the same things return, we take frequently, for a new discovery, the revival of an art or science long before known. It is much the same with opinions, and even with many demonstrated principles of knowledge. The most absurd of the former come into publick vogue, as well as the most evident of the latter; and the latter go out of it again, as well as the former. Let us descend into some particulars, that may serve to illustrate what is here said.

When we look into the history of the Greeks and Romans, how ignorant do these people appear to have been in the art of navigation? In what cockboats was the fate of the war decided at Salamis? What idea must we have even of the Carthaginian fleets, when we see them vanquished by a people whose skill had gone, till the first Punick war, little farther than hollowing trees into mishapen and unwieldy canoes*? How slow was the progress of this art afterward? Confined to the Mediterranean, and attempting little and seldom the Ocean, obliged, in both, to cling to the shore†, the stoutest of their ships of

* Caudicariæ naves. † Legere et radere littus.

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war would have foundered where a Deal yawl rides securely. Shall we conclude now, from these representations, that they show us the beginning of navigation? No. We see in them the decay of the art. To inquire critically into the voyages of Bacchus, of Hercules, of Jason; to fix the times when these heroes flourished, or when Minos held the dominion of the sea, would be impertinent industry. It is enough to know, that though the Greeks were frightened at the flux and reflux of the sea, that new and astonishing phænomenon to this knowing people, even at the time of Alexander's expedition, the Indian ocean, rough as it is, had been explored long before by merchants who sailed from the coast of Arabia and Egypt. If Hercules erected his columns at the mouth of the Streights, the Phœnicians passed beyond them. They visited the coasts of Portugal, the Fortunate Islands, or the Canaries, and even the utmost Thule; perhaps the other hemisphere, and the islands, at least, which Columbus had the honour of discovering some thousands of years afterward. The ships of Midacritus, or Melcartus, traversed the Bay of Biscay, and brought lead or tin "ex Cassiteride "insulâ," probably from Cornwall. This we learn from obscure tradition, and what do we see in the clearer light of history but the restoration of this very art? We have spoke of an art. Let us speak now of a science.

Astronomy had made a low figure among the Greeks for some time before Hipparchus, who lived

lived about the time of the sixth or seventh of the Ptolemys; and though we hear much of the fame of Thales, of Pythagoras, and Eudoxus, yet astronomy and astrology, which we distinguish very properly, were in those days confounded together. Men were much more attentive to discover the imaginary influences of the stars, than to observe their real motions; and the honours done to Berosus by the Athenians, for his divine predictions, show us in what manner, and to what purposes, this science was cultivated a little before Hipparchus, that is, in the time of Alexander. Hipparchus invented mathematical instruments for observing the celestial phænomena, and observed, it is said, very accurately. Ptolemy, another astronomer, came after him, and though he made some pretensions to astrology, as others had done, yet he was an astronomer in the proper sense. He improved on the improvements of Hipparchus, and the system which bears his name was universally received. It continued to be so till Copernicus arose; but if we conclude from hence, that we see the whole rise and progress of astronomy, or that Copernicus was the author of a new system, we shall be much deceived. We see astronomy in it's decayed and corrupt state, and we see it recover from thence, and return back to it's true principles. The beginnings of it, among the Egyptians and the Chaldeans, if in truth it did begin among them, the progress they made, and the degree of perfection to which they carried it, are unknown

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to us. But beside several probable reasons, which determine us to think that they carried it very far, we know certainly, that the true solar system, which Copernicus discovered about two hundred years ago, was taught in the Pythagorean schools about two thousand years ago, and was by consequence that of the schools of Egypt and Babylonia.

To speak now of opinions, and of the self-evident, or demonstrated principles of real knowledge: the former fluctuate perpetually. When one of them alone can be true, a thousand that stand in direct opposition to one another are entertained. While they last they are unsteady; time and experience explode them often; and when they return into use again, they are seldom exactly the same. The latter are fixed and uniform; time and experience confirm them; they cannot be exploded, they may be unknown, or they may be forgot; but whenever they are perceived by the mind, far from degenerating into opinions, they are perceived by every mind alike. Thus, I think, we are to understand that axiom of the stoician, Balbus, "opinionum commenta "delet dies, naturæ judicia confirmat." It may be, it has been said, that the latter part of this axiom is often contradicted by experience, and that false demonstrations have taken often the place of true, as opinions merely probable, nay, improbable, have passed among whole nations for the most demonstrated truths. But I suspect that this has been the case in appearance rather than

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in reality, or that the exceptions are too few to invalidate the general rule. Truths, that may be called properly the judgments of nature, because they are conformable to the nature of things, and have been deduced from thence by a process of reasoning, in every step of which the mind has had intuitive knowledge, cannot be removed; they must be confirmed by time, the nature of things, and the reason of men continuing the same. But these very truths may be so disguised by opinions which are thought to be compatible with them, which muffle them up, and which cling to them, though they be parts of them no more than clothes are parts of body, that the same principle of real knowledge professed by different people, or at different times, appears to be a different principle. If Diagoras, or Theodorus, or Vanini, or any other particular atheist, for a community of atheists never existed out of Mr. Bayle's head, had been asked, whether it is not the interest of every individual to submit to government, and to promote the good of society; or if any theist had been asked, whether this be not the duty, as well as the interest of every individual, they would all have answered in the affirmative, and have assented to these first principles of publick and private morality. Notwithstanding this, what a variety of opinions has there not been about this interest and this duty? They have been so various, as well as the practice of men consequent from them, that whoever considers his own, or past ages, may be tempted to think,

think, that in some countries the obligation of submitting to government is esteemed unconditional and illimited; and, in others, no obligation at all; or that, as he sees no country wherein the common duties of society are enough observed, so there are others wherein every man deems himself an individual, independent by nature, and disavows any such duty. Suppose now, that in one of these countries liberty be established on a system of law equally distant from tyranny and from licentiousness. Suppose, that in another such a reformation of manners be wrought, no matter by what means, that the duties of morality are practised in it universally, and with the utmost exactness, shall we conclude from these examples, that in the former case the principles of publick, and in the latter those of private morality, were never known, or had been lost, and were then demonstrated anew? Shall we not rather conclude, according to the truth of things, that these principles have been always known, and that the new establishment, and the new reformation, do nothing more than strip them of the false opinions, which were so complicated with them, that men derived their institutions and notions, not from the sure judgments of nature, but from the false comments of opinion*?

* N.B. There is a passage in Polybius worth being turned to on this occasion. It is in the thirteenth book. He observes there how truth is disguised or concealed by the false opinions of men; but he insists, that these last for a time only, and that truth prevails always.

Thus,

Thus, again, the existence of one Supreme, self-existent, and all-perfect Being, the first intelligent cause of all things, was acknowledged, as we discern more or less clearly by almost all our ancient traditions, in those nations who had any pretence to be esteemed civilised, and most directly and explicitly in those that were the most enlightened by knowledge. But yet this bright and luminous truth, this judgment of nature, was clouded by such a multitude of superstitious notions, that it appeared dubiously, and that something which seemed repugnant to it might have been objected to every nation who professed it in their outward, or even in their secret doctrine. An orthodox Israelite was scandalised, no doubt, when he beheld among his heathen neighbours their deceased kings and heroes erected into divinities, and adored as such. But we may assure ourselves, that an inhabitant of Thebes, in Egypt, who acknowledged no god but the unborn eternal Kneph, or even a polytheist, who, worshipping many gods, that is, inferior divinities, acknowledged still one Supreme Being, the monarch of gods and men, was not less scandalised when he saw this Being, of whom he had the sublimest conceptions that the mind of man can frame, degraded into the rank of a local tutelary divinity, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of one family, and one nation, of a family who had strolled into Egypt for bread, of a nation who had been long slaves in that country. In vain would the learned priests

priests of all sides have explained their symbolical rites, and mystick doctrines. The Israelite would have remained convinced, that the one true God was unknown to the heathen; and the heathen, that he was unknown to the Israelite. It fared with this principle of knowledge, as Plutarch observes in one of his miscellaneous tracts, in the manner that it fares with the virtues. The prudence of Ulysses appeared different from that of Nestor, and the justice of Cato from that of Agesilaus. The same principle of knowledge, derived from the same use of reason, took various appearances from the various opinions that were complicated with it in the minds of men, much as the same virtue took a different hue, according to the different tempers, characters, and circumstances of those who professed and practised it.

This seems to have been the state of things till the coming of Christ. Whether the knowledge and the worship of the one true God were taught by revelation, or by reason, that which is affirmed concerning them cannot be true. In the first case, they must have been known from the beginning by all the people of the Earth, and long before the Israelites grew up to be a nation. In the second case, the man who should assert, that Abraham, or any other of the patriarchs, was alone able to make these discoveries by dint of reason, and philosophical reflection, would not deserve a serious answer. Nay, further, if we go upon the first supposition, that of revelation, if

we take the words of some divines, that this belief and worship could be communicated no other way to mankind, and that this sacred deposite was trusted to a people chosen to preserve it till the coming of the Messiah, this assumption will appear as little conformable to the reason of things, as several others are which the same men advance to be parts of the divine œconomy, and for which they appeal to the reason of mankind. Reason will pronounce, that no people was less fit than the Israelites to be chosen for this great trust, on every account. They broke the trust continually; and the miracles that were wrought to preserve it, notwithstanding their apostacies, would have preserved it, at least as well, all over the world. Besides, the revelations made to them were "shut up in a little corner of the world, "among a people, by that very law which they "received with it, excluded from a commerce "and communication with the rest of mankind," as Mr. Locke* observes very truly. A people so little known, and contemned, and thought vilely of by those nations that did know them, were therefore very "unfit, and unable to propagate "the doctrine of one God in the world."

But wherefore, then, was this deposite made to them? It was of no use to other nations before the coming of Christ, nor served to prepare them for the reception of his Gospel; and after his coming, it was in this great respect of little use,

* Reas. of Chris.

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if of any, to the Jews themselves. They believed universally one God, but they were not universally disposed to believe in his Son. Monotheism might indispose them to the Gospel, as well as their attachment to the law of Moses. The expectation of the Messiah did not clash with monotheism. But they might imagine, that the belief of God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, did so very manifestly; the trinity not having been early reconciled to the unity of God. Other nations seemed to be better prepared by philosophy, by that of Plato in particular, and by the polytheistical notions of divine natures, some in the godhead, and some out of it, for the reception of the Gospel, or of the theology which the preachers of the Gospel taught. Accordingly we find, that when Christ came, and threw down the wall of partition, if he did throw it down, and not St. Paul, the miracles wrought to propagate Christianity had greater effect out of Judea than in it. On the whole matter, it is impossible to conceive, on grounds of human reason, to what purpose a divine œconomy, relative to the coming of Christ, should have confined the knowledge of the true God to the Jews, and have left the rest of mankind without God in the world. On the other side, if men dicovered the Creator of all things by their observations and their reasonings, things must have passed much as the memorials of ancient times give us grounds to believe that they did pass. The knowledge of the true God must have been uncertainly propagated, and uncertainly

certainly maintained; it must have been never lost, but always liable to be darkened by too much ignorance and stupidity in some, and too much imaginary knowledge, and the endless refinements of opinion in others.

That our Saviour found the whole world in a state of errour concerning this first principle of natural religion, though not of absolute darkness, is allowed; and that the spreading of Christianity has contributed to destroy polytheism and idolatry is true. But that, which Mr. Locke advances to have been the consequence of this great event, is not true. It is not true, that God has been made known to the world by this revelation, with such evidence and energy, that polytheism and idolatry have been no where able to withstand it. On the contrary, orthodox theism has not prevailed in some countries where it has been taught. In others, Christianity has been established on the ruins of polytheism and idolatry, and has been rooted up again in it's turn. Revelation has had no better success than reason. Neither has been able to preserve the purity of the doctrines they taught, nor a uniformity in the practice they prescribed. Nay, Mahometanism, a religion instituted by an Arabian free-booter, who imposed himself for a prophet of God, and composed that extravagant rhapsody of superstition and enthusiasm, the Koran, has been further propagated than Christianity, and that not by the sword alone, no more than Christianity. Mahomet, and the first caliphs, established their religion

religion by the success and terrour of their arms; but since that time it has been extended by spiritual conquests, and not only the conquered, but the conquerors, for such the Turks were, have embraced it. Christ, his apostles, and the first preachers of Christianity, established this religion by their miracles, and by their sufferings. But since that time it has been propagated and preserved by violence as great, at least, as that which the Saracens employed to establish the other. But, however, and by what means soever, these religions have been extended, that of Mahomet has taught the unity of God in terms so clear, and so precise, as to leave no room for any opinions that may be so much as strained into polytheism; and has so effectually banished all kinds of images, that the most gross and superstitious of the vulgar cannot have the least occasion of sliding into idolatry.

Christ found the world in darkness and errour; if he was to come again, would he not find it in the same state? Would he find even the religion he came to establish, either practised, or even taught in it's genuine purity? Would he not find the decalogue shortened, and the creed lengthened, by some Christians? Would he not find the creed shortened by others, who left the decalogue of the same size, even by Mr. Locke himself? Christianity has been, from the institution of it, in a perpetual flux, not relatively to certain opinions alone, that may be deemed indifferent, or not quite essential; but relatively to fundamental

mental articles, on which the whole system leans. Let me produce one instance, which will illustrate and confirm what has been said against those who take so much pains to make us believe, that polytheism and idolatry prevailed among the nations of the world from the beginning. Arianism had very nearly prevailed in the Christian church. It was all that intrigue could do to check, and all that wars and persecutions, wherein millions perished, could do to extirpate this heresy. Let us suppose now, that these salutary methods had proved ineffectual, and that the orthodox faith was at this time creeping about in corners, as the Arian faith actually is, and was preserved only by a few rational and thinking men, who were fain, in their outward profession and worship, to go with the herd, and to keep to the religion established by law; I ask, would it be fair to conclude, that the orthodox faith had never been the faith of the Christian church, and that this abominable heresy had been established from the beginning? It would not be so most certainly. To recapitulate, therefore, and to conclude; I think it plain, that the knowledge and worship of the one true God must have been the religion of mankind for a long time, if the Mosaical history be authentick, and was not, therefore, confined from the beginning to the family of Shem, nor to the Israelites, who pretended to be of it. I think it plain, that the assumed confinement of this orthodox faith and worship could answer no imaginable design of a

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divine œconomy, preparatory to the coming of Christ; since the Jews, who had it, were not better prepared than the Gentiles, who are said not to have had it, to receive and embrace the Gospel; and since this doctrine was propagated much more by heathen philosophers than by Jewish doctors. I think it plain, that if we suppose the unity of God to have been discovered by reason, and to have been propagated by human authority merely, the belief of it must have gone through all the vicissitudes, and have been exposed to all the corruptions, that appear to have attended it. I add, that we have the less reason to be surprised at this, or to doubt of it, since we see that very faith, which God himself came on Earth to publish, which was confirmed by miracles, and recorded by divine inspiration, subject to the same vicissitudes, and the same corruptions.

ESSAY THE FOURTH:

CONCERNING

AUTHORITY

IN

MATTERS OF RELIGION.

ESSAY THE FOURTH.

SECTION I.

ALL men are apt to have a high conceit of their own understandings, and to be tenacious of the opinions they profess; and yet almost all men are guided by the understandings of others, not by their own, and may be said more truly to adopt, than to beget, their opinions. Nurses, parents, pædagogues, and after them all, that universal pædagogue custom, fill the mind with notions that it had no share in framing, which it receives as passively, as it receives the impressions of outward objects, and which, left to itself, it would never have framed perhaps, or would have examined afterward. Thus prejudices are established by education, and habits by custom. We are taught to think what others think, not how to think for ourselves; and while the memory is loaded, the understanding remains unexercised, or exercised in such trammels as constrain it's motions, and direct it's pace, till that which was artificial becomes in some sort natural, and the mind can go no other.

Wrong notions, and false principles, begot in this manner by authority, may be called, properly enough,

enough, the bastards of the mind; and yet they are nursed and preserved by it as if they were the legitimate issue; nay, they are even deemed to be so by the mind itself. The mind grows fond of them accordingly, and this mistaken application of self-love makes men zealous to defend and propagate them by the same kind of authority, and by every other sort of imposition. Thus they are perpetuated, and as they contract the rust of antiquity, they grow to be more respected. The fact, that was delivered at first on very suspicious testimony, becomes indisputable; and the opinion, that was scarce problematical, becomes a demonstrated proposition. Nor is this at all wonderful. We look at original, through intermediate authority, and it appears greater and better than it is really, just as objects of sight are sometimes magnified by a hazy medium. Men who would have been deemed ignorant, or mad, or knavish, if they had been our contemporaries, are reverenced as prodigies of learning, of wisdom, and of virtue, because they lived many centuries ago. When their writings came down to posterity, posterity might judge, indeed, of their characters on better grounds than report and tradition; but the same authority, which showed them in a half light, screens them in a full one. Paraphrases and commentaries accompany their writings. Their mistakes are excused, their contradictions are seemingly reconciled, their absurdities are varnished over, their puerilities are represented as marks of a most amiable simplicity,

city, their enthusiastical rants as the language of the most sublime genius, or even of inspiration; and as this is frequently done with much skilful plausibility, so it is always aided by the strong prepossessions that have been created in their favour. The first traditional authorities that handed down fantastick science, and erroneous opinions, might be no better than the original authorities that imposed them: but they were sufficient for the time; and when errour had once taken root deeply in the minds of men, though knowledge increased, and reason was better cultivated, yet they served principally to defend and embellish it. Truths, that have been discovered in the most enlightened ages and countries, have been, by such means as these, so blended with the errours of the darkest, that the whole mass of learning, which we boast of at this hour, must be separated and sifted at great expense, like the ore of a poor mine; and like that too, will hardly pay the costs.

It may sound oddly, but it is true in many cases, to say, that if men had learned less, their way to knowledge would be shorter and easier. It is, indeed, shorter and easier to proceed from ignorance to knowledge, than from errour. They who are in the last, must unlearn before they can learn to any good purpose; and the first part in this double task is not, in many respects, the least difficult, for which reason it is seldom undertaken. The vulgar, under which denomination we must rank, on this occasion, almost all the

the sons of Adam, content themselves to be guided by vulgar opinions. They know little, and believe much. They examine and judge for themselves in the common affairs of life sometimes, and not always even in these; but the greatest and the noblest objects of the human mind are very transiently, at best, the object of theirs. On all these, they resign themselves to the authority that prevails among the men with whom they live. Some of them want the means, all of them want the will, to do more; and as absurd as this may appear in speculation, it is best, perhaps, upon the whole, the human nature and the nature of government considered, that it should be as it is.

Scholars and philosophers will demand to be excepted out of the vulgar, in this sense; but they have not a just claim to be so excepted. They profess to seek truth without any other regard; and yet the task of unlearning errour is too hard for them. They set out in this search with the same prejudices, and the same habits that they who neglect it have, and they lean on authority in more cases than the others. If they improve and employ their reason more, it is only to degrade her the more; for they employ her always in subordination to another guide, and never trust themselves wholly to her conduct, even when authority cannot have the appearance of authority without her approbation. The task of unlearning errour, and laying authority aside in the search of truth, is not only hard in itself,

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but it becomes harder still by two considerations, as it implies a self-denial of vanity, and of ambition. Scholars are ostentatious of their learning, and though he who has read much will not arrive at truth so soon, nor so surely, as he who has thought much, yet will he make a greater glare, and draw more admiration to himself. The man who accumulates authorities of philosophers, of fathers, and of councils, to establish an opinion that must be founded in reason, and be agreeable to the common sense of mankind, or be founded in nothing, is not unlike the child who chooses a crown in several pieces of brass, rather than a guinea in one piece of gold. Thus, again, we must not imagine, that we behold an example of modesty and moderation, when we see a whole sect of philosophers submit to the authority of one, as the Pagans, Christians, and Mahometans did in their turns, and for many ages, to that of Aristotle; while they dared to reason in no other form, nor on any other principles, than those which he had prescribed. It is, in truth, an example of rank ambition. Such men, like the slaves who domineer in absolute monarchies, intend, by their submission to a supreme tyrant, to acquire the means of exercising tyranny in their turns.

There are innumerable cases in common life, and many in arts and sciences, wherein we must content ourselves, according to the condition of our nature, with probability, and rely on author-

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ity for want of means, or opportunities of knowledge. I rely on the authority of my cook, when I eat my soup; on the authority of my apothecary, when I take a dose of rhubarb; on that of Graham, when I buy my watch; and on that of Sir Isaac Newton, when I believe in the doctrine of gravitation; because I am neither cook, apothecary, watchmaker, nor mathematician. But I am a rational creature, and am therefore obliged to judge for myself in all those cases where reason alone is the judge; the judge of the thing itself; for even, in the others, reason is the judge of the authority. My parson might reproach me very justly with the folly of going through the journey of life without opening the eyes of my mind, and employing my intellectual sight. But my parson grows impertinent when he would persuade me, like those of your church, to remain in voluntary blindness; or like those of ours, to let him see for me, though my eyes are open, though my faculties of vision are at least as good as his, and though I have all the same objects of sight before my eyes that he has before his.

Resignation to authority will appear the more absurd, if we consider, that by it we run two risks instead of one. We may deceive ourselves, no doubt: but is the divine, is the philosopher, infallible? We shall not mean to deceive ourselves, most certainly: but the divine, or the philosopher, may intend to deceive us. He may find his account in it, and deceit may be his trade. Had these men that superiority over others

others, which some of them have assumed; did the sublime objects of divine philosophy appear to them, though they do not appear so to us, in the effulgence of an immediate and direct light, there would be some better reason than there is for a dependence on their authority, at least in one respect. We might own their knowledge sufficient to establish this authority, whatever we thought of their candour and sincerity. But God has dealed more equally with his human creatures. There is no such superiority of some over others. They who exercise their reason, and improve their knowledge the most, are dazzled and blinded whenever they attempt to look beyond the reflected light wherein it is given us to contemplate the existence, the nature, the attributes, and the will of God relatively to man. They who pretend to face, like so many intellectual eagles, the sun of eternal wisdom, and to see in that abyss of splendour, are so truly metaphysical madmen, that he who attends to them, and relies on them, must be mad likewise.

The more important any subject is, the more reason we have to be on our guard against the impositions and seductions of authority, and to judge in the best manner we can for ourselves. The all-wise God has disposed the universal order so, that every man is, by his nature, capable of acquiring a certain and sufficient knowledge of those things which are the most important to him, while he is left to probability and belief about others; and yet such are the contradictions which

reconcile themselves to one another in the heads and hearts of men, that even they who perceive the importance of the subject, and are not delivered over by a supine neglect to authority, are however deterred by an unreasonable timidity from the use of their own judgments, and are determined, by an affection of their minds, in opposition to common sense, to deliver themselves over to the prevalent authority, whatever they be. Thus, they who invade the reason of mankind triumph, not by their own strength, but by the prejudices of the invaded. Their success may be compared to that of a certain prince who placed, it is said, cats and other animals, adored by the Egyptians, in the front of his army when he invaded that people. A reverence for these phantoms made the Egyptians lay down their arms, and become an easy conquest.

This timidity is the less excusable, because the divine Wisdom, as I hinted above, has been pleased to manifest to us a rule of inquiry and judgment in matters of divine philosophy and natural religion, that is sure, as far as it goes, and it goes most certainly as far as the same Wisdom intended that our inquiries and judgments should proceed. It serves at once both to direct and limit them. God has shown these great objects to us in a light reflected from his works, and proportioned to our nature. He has shown them in no other, in the ordinary course of his providence. The way, therefore, to avoid fantastical, and to attain some degree of real knowledge concerning them, is to apply

apply ourselves to a careful observation of the phænomena of nature, corporeal and intellectual, as nature is commonly distinguished. The true foundations of natural theology must be laid in natural philosophy. So they have been laid, in part at least, by ancient and modern theists, and by the latter especially, since the wonderful discoveries that have been made by the improvement of experimental philosophy; discoveries that might send the wisest men of antiquity, sacred and profane, could they arise from the dead with all their wisdom and all their learning about them, once more to school.

The foundations* of theism have been laid wider, but they wanted no solidity before these discoveries.

* This note is added a great number of years after I had written what is contained in the text referred to, and after my opinions concerning the Supreme Being, and the proofs of his existence, had been established in my mind; because I have lately found, in the History of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Berlin, for the Year 1746, a Dissertation written by a very ingenious man, a very good philosopher, and one with whom I have been long acquainted, that I cannot approve, on many accounts. His avowed design is, to deduce the proofs of God's existence from the general, not any particular laws of nature, and to deduce those of motion and rest metaphysically from the attributes of the Supreme Intelligence.

To make way for this proof, he rejects or endeavours to weaken every other proof, on this pretence, that the attempt to establish truth on false reasonings is the greatest injury which can be done to it. I shall not take on me to examine his hypothesis, how little soever I like the deduction of a physical hypothesis from metaphysical principles, instead of

discoveries. These new proofs, nay, all the proofs beyond those which every observing man is able to establishing general, abstract, or, if you please, metaphysical axioms on particular experiments and observation.

Mr. Maupertuis lays no weight on the famous argument of Descartes, taken from the idea of an infinite, all-perfect Being, which he supposes to be in the human mind; and Maupertuis is in the right. He says little on the assumed universal consent of mankind to this great and fundamental truth, and he is not in the wrong. This consent is not such as it stands represented by many. It is general enough to shew the proportion which this truth bears to the universal reason of mankind, and I think it would prove no more, if it was still more general. The actual existence of such a Being cannot be fairly deduced from it. He will not insist, he says, on the argument which may be drawn from the intelligence whereof we are conscious, to a first Intelligence, infinite and eternal, which is the original of all intelligence, and the first Cause of all things; and yet I apprehend, that he has given us none so good by the help of metaphysicks and mathematicks as this, which is plain and obvious to the conception of every rational creature.

That some theists have reasoned weakly from the phænomena of nature to the existence of God, is, I believe, true; as I am sure it is true, that others would have made the doctrine of final causes ridiculous, if any thing could make it so, by the ridiculous application of it on every unworthy and trifling occasion. But we must not learn from hence to despise all those arguments, which ancient philosophers drew from the beauty, order, and disposition of the universe, on this smart conceit, that they knew too little of nature to have a right to admire it.

He is not satisfied, neither, with those which Newton, and much less with those which other naturalists have drawn from the same phænomena. If he cites those of Newton, it is only to show how weak and inconclusive even these are. Newton thought, that the uniform motion of the planets proved itself necessarily

to draw, even from an unphilosophical view of the system of nature, are proofs "ex abundantiâ." I honour

necessarily to have been directed by choice, not by chance, and he shows the great probability of this doctrine. But then he thinks there remains probability enough on the other side, to hinder us from saying, that this uniformity must have been necessarily the effect of choice, though it should be granted, agreeably to Newton's system, that all the celestial bodies, being drawn towards the sun, move in a vacuum. On the other hand he advances, that the force of Newton's argument, being founded alone on the impossibility of assigning a physical cause of this uniformity in his hypothesis, it will have no force with other philosophers. The uniformity of these motions will not appear inexplicable to those who admit a fluid matter, in which the planets are hurried round, or by which their motion is moderated. On this foot we are not reduced to the alternative of supposing either chance, or choice, and such a uniformity of motion will prove the existence of God no more, than any other motion impressed on matter. This Maupertuis says. But till the physical cause of the uniform motion of the planets has been explained intelligibly by the hypothesis of a fluid, we must remain where we were, and have recourse in one case, as well as in the other, to choice or chance.

This philosopher thinks, that the argument, drawn by Newton from the formation of animals, has no more strength than the former. He asks, whether, if the uniformity of some be a proof on one side, the infinite variety of others will not be a proof on the other side? Now surely these proofs are so far from being contradictory, that they coincide. The eagle, the fly, the stag, the snail, the whale, and the oyster, are very different animals, no doubt; and the immense variety of the different species of animals appropriated to different elements and purposes, displays the magnificence of the animal world, and the infinite power of it's Author, as the uniformity of all those of the same species shows the design and wisdom of that

I honour most sincerely those philosophers, who have endeavoured to raise the thoughts of men, by

Being who created them, and appropriated them to the same elements, and to the same purposes. When we compare an eagle to a fly, we find a proof of one. When we compare an eagle to an eagle, we find a proof of the other. In short, the objection is founded in cavil, not in argument.

Mr. Maupertuis proceeds and admits, but admits as if it were for argument's sake alone, that the proportion of the different parts and organs of animals to their wants carries a more solid appearance; and he judges, that they reason very ill, who assert, that the uses, to which these parts and organs are applied, were not the final causes of them, but that they are so applied, because the animal is so made. Chance gave eyes and ears, and since we have them, we make use of them to see and hear. He thinks, however, it may be said, that, chance having produced an immense number of individuals, those of them, whose parts and organs were proportioned to their wants, have subsisted, while those who wanted this proportion have perished and disappeared. Those who had no mouth, for instance, could not eat, and live; those who wanted the organs of generation could not perpetuate their species: and thus from the present state of things theists draw an argument, which will appear fallacious, when it is applied to the possible original of things.

To ridicule the proofs of this kind, he asks, a little too triumphantly, what it signifies to discover appearances of order and proportion, if after this discovery we are stopped in our reasoning by some untoward conclusion? He instances in the serpent, who can neither walk nor fly, and yet saves himself from the pursuit of other animals by the flexibility of his body, which enables him to crawl away faster than many of them can follow him. The cold of the winter would chill him to death, if the form of his body, and the slippery smoothness of his skin, did not enable him, likewise, to creep through holes that hide him under the ground. This is the discovery. The untoward conclusion follows, and he asks, to what purpose

by these discoveries, from the phænomena up to the Author of nature, instead of amusing the world,

pose does all this serve? Why truly to none but the preservation of an animal, whose bite is sufficient to kill a man. Thus the philosopher endeavours to destroy one proof of God's existence, by begging the same question as the divine begs, when he would prove, that God is unjust, because there is either physical or moral evil in the world; that is, by assuming man to be the final cause of the creation.

The great and respectable persons, such as father Malebranche, whose authority Maupertuis cites against the order observed in the construction of the universe, and who were at a loss to comprehend how it could be the work of a Being infinitely wise and powerful, build their objections on the same assumption, and ran, as he observes, into many absurd systems. But I wave entering any farther here into the consideration of this assumption, and the use that is made of it, since I have taken occasion to speak fully about it in another place.

The criticism he makes on that expression, which closes the first of Mr. Pope's Ethick Epistles, "whatever is, is right," cannot be maintained. The proposition is not advanced as an argument to prove the existence of God, nor as a profession of faith, "un acte de foi." I presume Mr. Pope meaned it as a reasonable consequence of what he supposed already proved, and that, when design and wisdom were so evidently marked in all the works of God, which are objects of human observation and knowledge, it became his creatures to conclude, that the same wisdom and design were employed in the whole, though human observation and knowledge cannot reach to the whole; and therefore, that he was justified, as he was most certainly, in pronouncing, that "whatever is, "is right." To say, that this axiom tends to submit all things to a fatal necessity, is not true. To say, that it establishes submission and resignation to the divine Providence, in opposition to the pride and presumption of philosophers and divines,

world, like many others, with metaphysical abstractions. But yet I think, that we wanted neither a Boyle, nor a Ray, nor a Derham, nor a Newyntit to convince us of the selfexistence of an intelligent Being, the first Cause of all things; and I am sure, that we are much to blame if we want a Bentley, or a Clarke, to put us in mind, for in truth they do no more, of the existence of such a Being. In short, natural theology rests on

is true. It is a truth which no man should be ashamed to own, and which every rational creature should be ashamed to contradict.

Maupertuis himself admits enough to establish this truth, when he admits, that intelligence and design are perceivable in a multitude of the phænomena; and yet he does not give up the point. It is enough, he says, to prove intelligence and design. To prove the wisdom of God, we must penetrate into the objects to which this intelligence and design were directed. Ability in the execution is sufficient. To show this wisdom, we must prove his motives to have been reasonable. To what purpose do we admire that regularity with which all the planets move the same way, almost in the same plane, and in orbits nearly alike, if we do not see, that it is better that they should move so than otherwise, that is, if we have not discovered the sufficient reason, that Leibnitz requires in all cases where things may be done more ways than one? A reasonable man may content himself, without this sufficient reason, in many cases; and Leibnitz blundered grievously when he pretended to have found it in some. I doubt Maupertuis has not succeeded better, in deducing the first and universal laws of nature from the attributes of an all-wise and all-powerful Being, in order to show, that since the laws, which are observed in the universe, are the very same which such attributes must have produced, such a Being must exist, and be the author of these laws. Happily we have no want of this demonstration.

on better foundation than authority of any kind; and the duties of natural religion, and the sins against it, are held out to us by the constitution of our nature, and by daily experience, in characters so visible that he who runs may read them.

These revelations, for such they may be properly called, are made to the reason of mankind; and the same reason, that collects them from the face of nature, is able to propagate the knowledge of them, and to find means of enforcing, as far as the general imperfection of our nature, and particular contingent circumstances admit, a conduct suitable to them. But men have not been contented to do this. They have imagined, or they have found, in the frailty of the human nature, and the imperfection of the human state, an apparent necessity of going farther; of adding art to nature, falsehood to truth, and their own inventions for divine communications. In order to make the imposition pass, they have set authority in the place of reason. The religion of nature, and therefore of the God of nature, is simple and plain; it tells us nothing which our reason is unable to comprehend, and much less any thing which is repugnant to it. Natural religion and reason are always agreed, they are always the same, and the whole œconomy of God's dispensations to man is of a piece. But religions, founded in the pretended revelations we speak of here, grow voluminous and mysterious, oppose belief to knowledge, and when they cannot stand

a reasonable examination, escape from reason, by assuming, that they are above it. Many such religions have appeared in the world. We Christians reject them all, not only because they carry most evident marks of imposture, but because there can be no more than one true revelation, and that is undoubtedly the revelation we acknowledge; for choosing of which, however, and for rejecting the others, we must confess, that we had no reason at all, or we must confess, that the truth of a revelation is an object of reason, and to be tried by it.

Religions, instituted by men who thought themselves inspired when they were only mad, or by men who were thought to be inspired when they were only cheats, rest on the mere authority of their founder, maintained and improved by his disciples, and their successors. Reason had no share in examining the original pretended revelation, nor has much in examining the descent of the tradition that preserves it. How could reason have any share in examining and controlling the first, on which the last, and all the consequences of an imposture depend, among men ignorant and credulous, or who were prepared by superstition to believe revelation no uncommon event? The enthusiast was not enough in his senses to reflect, that in order to be assured he had a revelation from God, it was necessary he should have not only a lively inward sentiment of the divine truth, that he supposed revealed to him, but also a clear and distinct perception of the time and manner

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in which this supernatural operation was performed. The impostor was enough in his senses to know, that no one was able to prove he had not the revelations he pretended to have; because no man is able any more to perceive the perceptions of another man's mind, however occasioned, than to see an outward object by the eyes, or to hear a sound by the ears of another. Believers in men of both these characters were never wanting; and far from examining, it became a merit not to examine.

He said it, was foundation enough for an article of faith in the Pythagorean religion; and the same proof was sufficient to establish the religion of Foe, that began in India, was propagated into China, and spread in several sects all over the East. The same observation may be made on other religions, that have been imposed by the force of authority, no matter how acquired, on ignorant and superstitious people at first, and on those of more sense and knowledge, when the authority was grown too strong to be shaken. But Christianity was not so imposed; and nothing can be more plain than this, that God submitted the authority of his revelation at the time he gave it, and therefore at every later time much more, to the reason of the creatures to whom he gave it.

When we consider the great and glorious purposes of this revelation, the manner in which, and the person, even the Son of God himself, by whom it was made, and all the stupendous miracles in the Heavens and on Earth, that were wrought

wrought to confirm it, we are ready to conclude, that such a revelation must have left reason nothing to do, must have forced conviction, and have taken away even the possibility of doubt. This consequence seems so necessary, that if such events were stated hypothetically, the hypothesis would be rejected as defective and inconsistent, unless they were supposed to have had their full effect; and yet, in fact, a universal submission of all those, who were witnesses of the signs and wonders that accompanied the publication of the Gospel, did not follow. The learned men among the Jews, the Scribes, the Pharisees, the rulers of the people, were persecutors of Christianity, not converts to it; and the vulgar, as well as they, were so far from believing Jesus to be the Messiah their nation expected, or any divine person sent by God, that when Pilate inclined to save him, instead of Barabbas, a notorious criminal, the whole crowd cried out, "let "his blood be on us and our children," and insisted, with a sort of mutinous zeal, on his execution.

What are we to say now? The Jew will insist, that the miracles might be such as they are reported to have been, but that, if they were such, they were wrought by the powers of magick, like those of Apollonius of Thyana; or by some secret charm, like that of the true pronunciation of the name that consisted of four letters, the famous tetragrammaton; and that his ancestors had reason, therefore, to reject the proofs drawn from them,

them, instead of believing, that the God of Truth had set his seal, as it were, to an imposture. The infidel will insist, that all these miracles were equivocal at best, such as credulous superstitious persons and none else believed, such as were frequently and universally imposed by the first fathers of the Christian Church, and are so still by their successors, wherever ignorance or superstition abound. He will apply to miracles, what Bessarion said to saints, and bid us judge of the ancient by the modern. Thus will these men account for the little success which the Gospel had, on the first publication of it: little, I mean, when compared with the authority of the Preacher, whose divinity was sufficiently manifested under the disguise of humanity.

SECT. II.

But I ask, what now will a good and reasonable Christian say? He will not allege, I think, that the Jews were rejected, and the Gentiles called in: since his two antagonists would be ready to answer, that he set the effect in the place of the cause, and the cause of the effect, when he assumed, that the Jews refused to believe in the miracles and Gospel of Christ, because they were rejected, instead of assuming, that they were rejected because of their unbelief. Would he follow the example that has been set on other occasions? Would he reason from his notions,

tions, well or ill abstracted, of order, and of the fitness and unfitness of things to the conduct of God, call this reasoning demonstration, and when he found the phænomena stand in opposition to it, as they would do evidently in the present case, since the universality of submission to the Son of God was not paid, which ought to have been paid, according to all our ideas of order and fitness, would he have recourse to some bungling hypothesis to reconcile them? If he took this method, it would happen to him as it has happened to divines very often: he would strengthen the objection of the infidel, and not be able to solve it afterward.

An end to which the means are not proportioned can never be the end of Infinite Wisdom, seconded by Infinite Power. The means employed to establish and maintain the Gospel have not been sufficient to do it, independently of reason, and by the mere force of authority, from the first publication of it. The end and design, therefore, of Infinite Wisdom was not to subject human reason, how much soever it was in fact subjected by the first converts, to a revelation received implicitly, even on the authority of the Son of God himself, and much less by any other. Reason was made so necessary to judge of this revelation, even at the time it was given, that if we suppose ourselves transported back to that time, and inquiring into the truth of this revelation on the very spot where it was made, we shall find, that far from being determined by authority

rity in favour of it, our reason would have had much to do in comparing the various and contradictory testimonies, and in balancing the degrees of probability that resulted from them. The contest between the first witnesses of Christian revelation, and the rest of the Jews who witnessed against it, became a party contest, carried on with great zeal on the persecuted side, and great cruelty on the other. They disputed not only about the miracles that had been wrought, and were daily working among them, even about that decisive concluding miracle, the resurrection of Jesus, but about the interpretation of their prophecies, which foretold the coming of the Messiah, and about the application of them to him. In such a confused state of things, on whose authority could any honest inquirer have depended? If he had weighed, or if he had counted suffrages, he would have been equally determined against the truth; and upon the whole he must have despaired of coming to a determination at all by any other way, than that of employing the utmost sagacity of his mind, and judging for himself, unless it had pleased God to make him some particular revelation.

This advantage St. Paul boasted that he had. The miracles of Christ and of his disciples made so little impression on him, though he had not only heard of them all, but had been an eyewitness, at least, of that which appeared when St. Stephen was stoned to death, that he signalized his zeal against Christianity till he himself became the subject

subject of a most miraculous operation, and was called upon by Jesus in a short, but very pathetick expostulation*. In this manner he was converted; and in this manner every inhabitant of the Earth, Jew or Gentile, learned or ignorant, might have been converted, as well as he. But it was not in the plan of Providence to employ the immediate, particular, miraculous, and therefore irresistible authority of revelation in many cases: and all other authority, even that of miracles, occasionally wrought before some, and reported by others, being inadequate to universal conviction, the generality of men were left to embrace Christianity or not, as their reason, right or wrong, weak or strong, should direct; and reason not being subdued by revelation, revelation was subjected to reason. St. Paul was not in this case: his reason had been subdued effectually. But he dealed with other men as being in it. He argued, he expostulated, he appealed to their reason principally. He worked, indeed, now and then a miracle, as it was given him to work them; for his case, in this respect, may be compared to that, which a divine of the faculty of Paris, whom I have quoted elsewhere, assumed to be the case of all those who wrote the books of the Old Testament. One seemed to have had inspirations, and the others a power of working miracles, occasionally, not constantly. Paul, therefore appeared chiefly to the reason of man-

* Acts of the Apost. ch. ix.

kind

kind in his several missions. On two of these missions, at least, it may be to our present purpose to make some reflection.

He preached at Antioch to the Jews and to the Gentiles: the former contradicted him, disputed with him, and raised a persecution against him and his companion Barnabas. The apostles worked no miracles on this occasion, like men who knew how ineffectual the authority they possesed was, for the most part, in the then ordinary exercise of that power. The last recourse was to reason; and when that failed, the apostles turned themselves from the lost sheep of the House of Israel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles were more docile, and free from the prejudices of the Jews about their prophecies, which only served to mislead them: reason had more effect on these; they rejoiced, they glorified the Word of God, and they believed, that is, as many of them as were preordained to eternal life*; for it would seem, by this passage, that neither authority, nor reason, nor miracles, nor all these together were sufficient to make men proselytes to Christianity without a previous designation, and divine election†. Let us follow St. Paul from

* Credidêrunt quotquot erant præordinati ad vitam æternam. Act. c. xiii.

† N. B. The opinion that God acts with men by arbitrary will, and by virtue of his absolute sovereignty over his creatures being once established; and, in consequence of it, the doctrines of election, reprobation, and an eternal predestination;

from Antioch to Rome, where he succeeded a little better among the Jews. Those of Asia looked upon him as an apostate, and were the more averse to Christianity, perhaps, for his preaching it. But the Jews at Rome had no prejudices against him, though he was brought thither in chains. They had received no letters about him from Judæa; no one who came from thence had spoke any evil of him. They had heard, indeed, of a new sect which was every where opposed, and they were desirous to know his opinion of it*. They took a day to hear him, and they heard him with remarkable patience, for they heard him from morning to night. He was full of the Holy Ghost, he argued from the law of Moses, from the prophets, and from every other topick, as we may assure ourselves, and omitted nothing, that might persuade them to embrace the Gospel. What was the effect? Some believed, and some believed not. The same may be observed of his proceeding at Thessalonica. He went into the synagogue, he worked no miracles, but he reasoned with the Jews three sabbath days, &c.

To conclude on this head then, it is plain that the first publishers of Christianity did not rest

tion; much of what has been said falls to the ground. Miracles were as superfluous as reason, where special grace was to operate, and both insignificant, where it was not to operate. I own myself unable to reconcile these apparent inconsistencies, and I leave that task to others.

* Acts. ch. xxviii.

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the cause primarily, or solely, on authority of any kind. It is plain, that they submitted the Gospel, and the authority of those who published it, to the examination of reason, as any other system even of divine philosophy ought to be submitted. The consequence was, that it prevailed, as other religions have done, and not with that universal assent which might have been expected from a religion given by God himself, and given to all the sons of men; from a revelation, their belief in which was to decide their eternal happiness or misery, and which Omnipotence could have imposed as easily on all as on some, if infinite Wisdom had so designed. Right reason is always on the side of truth: it is truth, and can never differ from itself. But right and wrong reason, the bona and mala of Cotta, being nothing else than the result of a right and wrong use of our faculties, it is no wonder the imperfection of these faculties, and the prejudices and seductions to which we are exposed being considered, that the wrong takes often the place of the right, and passes for it. Why the natural order of things was preserved thus far in the case of a supernatural dispensation, why so many particular miracles were wrought ineffectually to the general avowed design of this revelation, and why the divine authority of it was not manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all mankind, as the divine authority of the law was manifested to all concerned in it, that is, to all the Israelites, let us not presume to guess. In this manner Chris-

tianity was first promulgated; and in this manner, therefore, it was right and fit that Christianity should be promulgated.

But now, since the prerogative of reason was thus established over revelation originally, it is proper we should inquire how far this prerogative extends now, and whether it be lessened or increased, by length of time. In order to this, divines teach, that we must distinguish between the external and internal evidences of truth and divinity of the Christian revelation; by which I mean the testimony brought to prove the fact, that this revelation was made by God, and the character of the doctrines contained in it, whether worthy or unworthy of a divine original. If they can establish the fact sufficiently, the second attempt seems little necessary; but it is for the honour of Christianity to stand such examinations, as every pretended revelation declines; and our divines themselves exhort us so to examine; though it must be confessed, that when the result of our examination is not strictly conformable to the doctrines they teach, they damn us for examining, according to that absurd prerogative which they exercised frequently of advancing general propositions, and of condemning them in particular instances. Let us not be so absurd. He who examines in a manner to show, that while he refuses submission to the authority of man, as if it was that of God, he is careful not to reject the authority of God, as if it were that of man, does much more service to Christianity

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than he who resolves all into authority, and builds his religion on his faith, instead of building his faith on his religion; that is, than he who assents to facts and doctrines, and a whole system of religion implicitly, without an examination of any part of it, instead of believing things, that he can neither comprehend nor examine, on the foundation of those which he comprehends, and has examined.

Of the two sorts of evidence, that have been mentioned, the external comes first under examination; for nothing can be more ridiculous than that which has happened very often to philosophers and learned men, to examine the causes of things, to descant profoundly on their nature, and after that to find, that the existence of these things was doubtful, or the nonexistence certain. One of your divines would urge the authority of the church on this occasion, as sufficient to supply the want of any other proof, and to fill up the measure of probability, which he would call certainty. But he would urge it most absurdly, since he would prove in a circle the authority of the church by that of the Scriptures, and the authority of the Scriptures by that of the church. One of our protestant divines, who unite in opposition to the authority of your church, and would be glad to erect an authority very like to it each in his own, would mince the matter a little, would rather insinuate than assert such an authority, and rather persuade than demand submission to it. He would allow, that in the full

latitude of evangelical liberty, you have a right to examine the testimony in favour of Christianity. But he would attempt, at the same time, to show you, that it is much more easy, and full as safe, to rely on the authority of so many pious, judicious, and learned men as have made it the business of their lives to examine the testimonies of this revelation, and have agreed to affirm the validity of them.

Neither of these divines, however, would be so ridiculous, I think, as to deny, that the external evidence of Christian revelation has been diminished by time. They would own, that it has been so by the loss of many proofs, whereof time and accidents have deprived us. But I am apt to suspect, that if time and accidents had been more impartial, and had conveyed down to us all the proofs that were brought for it and against it, though proofs would have been more abundant, the evidence would not have been greater, and we should be puzzled as much by contradictory, as we are by scanty proofs. We have, indeed, the concurrent testimony of the sacred writers, and it has been asked, whether we have not as much knowledge of them as we have of several profane writers whose histories pass for authentick? It has been said too, by some of those who corrupt oftener than they correct the text of ancient authors, that it is by a multitude of various readings, and of critical emendations, that these authors have been restored. But the comparisons are by no means just; for a different proof is necessary of

of the competency of authors, and a different assurance of the sense of their writings, according to the different use that is made of the authority. We know, that the memorials of men who had been captains in the army of Alexander, and eyewitnesses of all that passed in his famous expedition, were, in some instances, different and contradictory. We have reason to suspect the veracity of Cæsar in some parts of his Commentaries; and if we had the commentaries of Labienus, or those of Asinius Pollio, as we have the history of Dion Cassius, we should have still more reason to suspect, or we should find more proofs, perhaps, of the errours. We read, however, the histories of Arrian, and even of Quintus Curtius, though we do not know who the latter was; and the Commentaries of Cæsar, as authentick histories. Such they are too, for all our purposes; and if passages which we deem genuine should be spurious, if others should be corrupted or interpolated, and if the authors should have purposely, or through deception, disguised the truth, or advanced untruth, no great hurt would be done. But is this the case of the Scriptures? In them, beside all the other circumstances necessary to constitute historical probability, it is not enough that the tenour of facts and doctrines be true; the least errour is of consequence. There was a time when the eastern and western churches had great disputes about the procession of the Holy Ghost; whether he proceeded from the Father and the Son, or from the Father by the Son. These disputes occasioned

much disorder, though the difference of a monosyllable was alone concerned. But other disputes had arisen before these, lasted longer, and devastated almost all Christendom by wars, persecutions, and massacres, though the sole difference between the contending parties was about a single letter. One side affirmed, and the Nicæan Council decreed, that the Son was ὁμοούσιος, that is, consubstantial with the Father, "habens simul es-"sentiam, id est, eandem essentiam," the Arians, most of them, at least, would have acknowledged him to be ὁμοιούσιος, that is, of similar substance, "habens similem essentiam;" but the holy council adhered, and the Arians were all damned for the difference of an iota. If the decrees of councils, therefore, and the several creeds that were made required so exact a precision of words and letters, and if the least mistake was of such fatal consequence, what must we think, what have we not reason to fear concerning that text on which they have all pretended to be founded, and wherein it is said, that there are thirty thousand various readings? When we meet with any record cited in history, we accept the historical proof, and content ourselves with it, of how many copies soever it may be the copy. But this proof would not be admitted in judicature, as Mr. Locke * observes, nor any thing less than an attested copy of the record. The application is obvious, and, if it be reasonable, to take such a precaution in

* Essay, l. 4, c. 16.

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matters that concern private property, and wherein the sum of ten pounds may not be at stake; how much more reasonable is it to neglect no precaution that can be taken, to assure ourselves, that we receive nothing for the Word of God, which is not sufficiently attested to be so. It may be said, it has been said by a very able writer, "that the ground of this proceeding in civil "courts seems to be, that the original re- "cord, or an attested copy, is capable of being "produced; and that, therefore, to offer any "distant proof might look as if some art were "intended to corrupt matters, and to disguise "the truth." After this, he asks, "is it in the "nature of things as possible and easy to pro- "duce the originals, or attested copies of the "Scriptures——as it is to do so in matters which "come before a civil court?" The evasion is not even plausible. The copy of a copy is not refused in proof, solely because the original or attested copy may be had, for this is not always the case, but because the proof would be too distant, whether they can be had or no. The two cases, therefore, are not vastly, as this writer affirms, nor at all different. If the rule may be thought reasonable in the one, it cannot be thought, without absurdity, unreasonable in the other. However it happens, the want of an original, or of an attested copy, is a want of proof: and the learned divine will be forced, if he is pushed on this article, to confess the want of proof, or to supply it, which he is too wise to attempt,

attempt, by showing, that the Scriptures we have are attested copies of the originals. I might carry this very far, if I would carry it as far as occasion is given to carry it. But I will only say, that it would be much better to leave objections unanswered, than to answer them no better; and that I pity a man of as good parts as Dr. Conybear, who is obliged to such drudgery. The authenticity of the Scriptures has suffered much diminution by length of time, and by other ways; for which reason divines would do better, perhaps, if they trusted more to grace and faith to supply this diminution, and less to their own skill, in the establishment of the external proofs of a traditional revelation; though I know, that these external proofs may be deemed to be in some sort "conditiones sine quibus non."

SECT. III.

But the prerogative of reason extends farther than the examination of witnesses, and other external testimony. There is another ground of probability to be established; and if this cannot be established, the credit of a revelation will not support itself on the other alone. This ground of probability is that which was mentioned at the same time with the former, and is called internal evidence. Divines sound it high, and build much upon it; but their proceedings is, to my apprehension, alike absurd and licentious.

A divine, who has a long stock of theological presumption, finds direct and evident proofs of a divine inspiration in the very style of the Scriptures; in the sublimity of some parts, and in the simplicity of others; though the same sublimity, and the same simplicity are to be found in uncanonical writings, and even in those of eastern nations, that are not Christian. He reasons magisterially, as if he was thoroughly acquainted, not only with the human, but with the divine nature; as if his understanding bore so near a proportion to the wisdom of God, that he could discover it latent in the deepest mysteries, or under the veil of things seemingly so indifferent, or so common, that men of less sagacity would not suspect even human wisdom to have been employed about them; and finally, as if his extended genius was able to comprehend a whole œconomy of divine Wisdom from Adam down to Christ, nay even to the consummation of things; to connect all the dispensations, and to show the sufficient reason of Providence in every particular instance on the same plan. This now is madness, or something worse than madness; and yet men are so accustomed to reason in this method, and on these principles, that not only the learned and ingenious, who have some pretence to be so mad, pursue them, but every babbler in theology, who has no such pretence, and must pass for a fool or a knave whenever he grows extravagant, affects to reason in the same manner, when he writes, or when he preaches; and talks as impertinently in the

pulpit, of the designs of God, and of the conduct of Providence, as he talks of the political designs and conduct of his governors in the coffee house. Thus the Bible becomes a canvas, on which it has been the business of many to daub, from the time when it was first spread before them. If it was agreed, that some outlines may have been traced by the original painter: yet would it be manifest, that several particular figures, and the composition of the whole system, is the work of bungling human pencils.

From a motley system thus framed, the pretended internal evidencies of divine revelation are drawn, and they are often drawn in such a manner, that he who might yield to external proofs is shocked at these, instead of being confirmed by them. How should it be otherwise, when these proofs are not brought even as they are found in this motley system, and when they take the appearance, for they have often no more, of proofs, not from the plain text and tenour of the Scriptures, but from the amplifications and conjectures of divines? These amplifications and conjectures take away the force of the proof, such as it is, by showing too visibly, that they are amplifications and conjectures; for it is not lawful to proceed in cases where divine, as in those where human knowledge, wisdom, and authority, are alone concerned. In these, our endeavours to improve what we find are not only lawful, but laudable; and it is no more reasonable, that the authority of those men, who have gone before

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us, should fix the bounds of our inquiries, than it is, that our authority should fix those of the men who are to come after us. Human science would have been long ago at a stand, if a contrary practice had prevailed universally, as we see it is, and has long been, in those particular countries where the contrary practice has so prevailed. But what is commendable in one case, is blamable in the other. We have no more right to add to the Word of God, than we have to alter it: and the same revelation which gives us divine knowledge, in what proportion soever it be given, and how little soever it may satisfy our curiosity, and our imaginary want, confines it likewise. The human master may tell us all he knows, and we may carry knowledge much farther on his instructions, and on our own strength. But the divine master tells us no more than he judges it fit we should know, and every step we attempt to make beyond his express revelation, and on our own strength, is a step we make in the dark, exposed to err, and sure not to know.

Though I think, that the internal evidencies of a divine revelation neither are, nor can be, such positive proofs as they are pretended to be; yet am I fully persuaded, that reason ought to examine the inward character of a revelation, as well as the outward testimony. Negative proof will supply the want of positive proof; and thus a sure and a real criterion will be found, instead of one that is equivocal at best, and imaginary. I will

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not perplex the argument by considering how far a conformity to the general experience of mankind is to be exacted in a history that relates principally to supernatural events; but I may insist, that there is another conformity, a conformity to all we know of the Supreme Being, and of the law of our nature, so very essential to a revelation that pretends to come from God, that if any one thing repugnant to this knowledge be found in any history or system of doctrine, they ought to be rejected, whatever proofs, external or internal, they may boast of a divine original. Though we hold no very exalted rank among the intellectual creatures of God, yet has he been pleased to give us faculties by which we are able, in using them well, to demonstrate all that he has judged necessary for us to know in our natural state, and without supernatural assistance, concerning his existence, his nature, and attributes, his providence over his creatures, and their duties to him and to one another. We ought to acknowledge, with the utmost gratitude, the advantage of such a rank in the order of beings: and shall we dare to assume for true any facts, or any doctrines, that are evidently inconsistent with this knowledge, however even good men may endeavour to reconcile in opinion, by frivolous discourse, things that are irreconcilable in nature, or whatever authority be employed to impose them? God forbid that we should. Right reason will never advise us to do so, and if any pretended revelation required that we should, it would

would prove itself to be false, for that very reason.

Natural revelation, so I will call it, produces knowledge, a series of sensitive and intuitive knowledge from the first principles to the last conclusions. The system of things that are, that is, the phænomena of nature, are the first principles; and reason, that is, a real divine illumination, leads from one necessary truth to another, through the whole course of these demonstrations. In all these cases we know; we do not believe. But in the case of supernatural revelation, when it is traditional, we can have nothing more than opinion, supported by human authority, and by decreasing probability afterward. The divine authority grows less and less apparent, while the obligation of submission to it is reputed still the same. But the certainty of natural revelation suffers no diminution. It is always original, and equally capable of forcing our assent in all times and places, because the principles by which it is manifested are equally objects of human sense and intellect, in all times and places. The missionary of supernatural religion appeals to the testimony of men he never knew, and of whom the infidel he labours to convert never heard, for the truth of these extraordinary events which prove the revelation he preaches: and it is said, that this objection was made at first to Austin the monk, by Ethelred the Saxon king. But the missionary of natural religion can appeal, at all times, and every where, to present and immediate evidence,

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to the testimony of sense and intellect, for the truth of those miracles which he brings in proof: the constitution of the mundane system being, in a very proper sense, an aggregate of miracles.

Upon the whole, let us suppose the historical and traditional authority, urged in proof of a revelation, to be carried as high as the nature of things will admit, on a concurrence of all the conditions necessary to establish such a probability as ought to stand in lieu of certainty, in every other case, and as may induce us, in this case, to believe, even in instances that are not at all conformable to general experience; yet must we not receive it for true till we are sure, on the most careful examination and analysis, that it contains nothing unworthy of the majesty of the Supreme Being, nothing inconsistent with the demonstrated truths of natural religion. Profane history may contain such things as are not conformable to general experience, and be nevertheless credible in all other respects. But sacred history, the history of a divine revelation, that contains any one thing unworthy of the Supreme Being, or repugnant to the religion of nature, and to the most evident dictates of reason, ought to be rejected with indignation, and will be so by every man who is afraid to blaspheme. There are many occasions on which we cannot discover the whole truth, and on which, however, we are very able to discern what implies contradiction with some selfevident or demonstrated truth. This may be one of those, and on this we shall

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be sure not to err, if we persuade ourselves, that the same God who gave us reason to arrive at certainty in some cases, and at probability in various degrees in others, never designed, that we should oppose probability, in any case, to certainty, nor believe against knowledge. Dr. Barrow, in a discourse concerning the virtue and reasonableness of faith, after begging the question long, and talking in a theological cant more worthy of Paul than of a man like him, as he was bound by his profession to do, talks like a philosopher, and a man of superior sense. He says, that "if we seriously weigh the case, we shall "find, that to require faith without reason is to "demand an impossibility; and that God, there-"fore neither doth, nor can enjoin us faith with-"out reason." Now I ask, if we are not obliged to believe without reason, can we be obliged to believe against it? He says, "that no man can "believe he knoweth not what nor why;" and, therefore, that he who "truly believeth, must "apprehend the proposition, and must discern "it's connection with some principle of truth, "which, as more notorious to him, he before "doth admit." Now let me ask again, can any man be said to apprehend a proposition which contains a mystery, that is, something unintelligible; or any thing more than the sound of words? Will not the argument against believing become still stronger, if a proposition is repugnant to the principles of truth, which we have before admitted on evident demonstration? I am

proud to have Dr. Barrow on my side, and will, therefore, conclude as he does, that the man, who pretends to believe otherwise, "doth only "pretend to believe out of some design, or from "affection to some party; his faith is not so "much really faith, as hypocrisy, craft, fondness, "or faction."

This being premised, let us own, that when a revelation has passed successfully through these trials, when it has all the authenticity of human testimony, when it appears consistent in all it's parts, and when it contains nothing inconsistent with any real knowledge which we have of the Supreme all-perfect Being, and of natural religion, such a revelation is to be received with the utmost profound reverence, the most intire submission, and the most unfeigned thanksgiving. Reason has exercised her whole prerogative then, and delivers us over to faith. To believe before all these trials, or to doubt after them, is alike unreasonable; for nothing can be more absurd and contemptible, than that St. Austin somewhere or other, for in his works I have read it, advances, about believing first, in hopes of understanding afterward; which is a proposition much like that which Calvin *, as absurd and as dogmatical a father as Austin, maintains, when he makes the authority of the Scriptures to depend on the inward testimony of the Spirit alone, and then mentions the proofs proper to establish the authen-

* Vid. Calvin's Inst. l. 1, c. 8.

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ticity and divinity of these books, as props, "ad-"minicula," that may help to support the faith they could not have raised.

SECT. IV.

If such absurdities as these have induced some to ridicule all religions that assume themselves founded on divine revelation, there are those who take occasion from the effects of them to form objections of a graver kind, and of greater consequence. These men would have it believed, that all such religions are incompatible with civil sovereignty; because they introduce a private conscience, that may be, and often is, contrary to the publick conscience of the state; and not only set up private judgment in opposition to that of the legislature, but enforce the dictates of it by a greater authority, even by that of God himself. The Jews were unsociable members of the great commonwealth of mankind: and the same private conscience, which determined them to the exercise of every kind of cruelty on other nations and other religions, made them rebels to government, even to their own, upon some occasions, and frequently persecutors and assassins of one another. They thought themselves authorised by their religion to commit such barbarities as even they, perhaps, if they had had no religion, would not have committed; and zeal for it, that is private conscience, inspired a sanguinary rage, that might be called, very justly, religious mad-

ness. To subdue those, and reduce them to a state of servitude who do not receive the Koran, is a first principle, that made innumerable countries the scenes of slaughter and misery. Mahomet, who taught it, practised it; and his successors have exercised the same violence, as far as they have been able to carry their arms. But this violence is not confined to those whom they call infidels, for the sects of Omar and Aly detest each other as much as they both do Christianity: and the doctors of Mecca gave as good a bull to Miriweis, to satisfy private consciences in taking arms against the sophy, as any pope ever gave to justify rebellion, and the deposition of a lawful prince*.

But to leave Judaism and Mahometanism, and to speak of the Christian religion, against which the objection is particularly directed, and which I mean particularly to defend; it must be confessed, that from the time it made any figure in the world, it appeared divided into sects, that even heathen persecution could not unite: and that from the time it became an established religion, it deluged the world with blood, at the suggestion, as well as under the pretence, of private conscience. Whatever sect prevailed, by ecclesiastical cabals, or by court intrigues, out of which the

* N. B. A manuscript in the king of France's library, writ at the time, and on the spot, gives an account of a journey which Miriweis made to Mecca for this purpose, before he invaded Persia and dethroned the sophy.

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ladies* were not always excluded, that sect dictated one publick conscience in the religion of the state. Another sect, that prevailed at another time, or in another place, by much the same means, dictated another; and of this we need no other proof than the several revolutions from Athanasianism to Arianism, and from Arianism to Athanasianism. One alone could prevail at once, and as there were many, there was always a resistance of private to publick conscience, more or less open, and which broke out in mutiny or rebellion on one side, and in massacres and persecutions on the other, very frequently. How it happened, I know not. Let divines tell that, or rather let us forbear to pry over curiously into the secret dispositions of Providence. But so it has happened, that the Christian religion has been attended by the same course of accidents as are common with it to every institution purely human. The best of these answer their end in part only from the first, and while the impression of the force, that set them a going, lasts; and never fail to slacken afterward, or to take new impressions from contingent events, by which they degenerate, and become insensibly new institutions under old names. A man who denies this, or who does not confess, like Charron †,

* If Irene had a determining influence over the fathers of the second Nicæan council, there is room to think, that another theological princess took part with Eusebius of Nicomedia in the first.

† De la Sagesse.

that, "after all, nothing shows more than religion "the weakness of humanity," is too ignorant, or too disingenuous to deserve an answer. But as government is not to be banished out of society, and anarchy to be introduced; because government, instead of securing the peace, and procuring the happiness of states, is often the cause of all their disorders, and of their final subversion: so neither is religion to be banished out of government, because, instead of strengthening and supporting, it serves often to weaken and to dissolve those that are the most firmly established.

What is here said of religion in general is eminently true of Christianity in particular. Though this religion was born, if I may say so, in a desert, and educated by a sect of the most obscure people in the Roman empire, and though it seemed calculated, in many instances, to be rather the institution of an order of reformers, than of a national governing religion; yet no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind. If it has had a contrary effect, it has had it apparently, not really. Theology is in fault, not religion. Theology is a science that may be compared justly to the box of Pandora. Many good things lie uppermost in it. But many evil lie under them, and scatter plagues and desolation through the world. If we cannot shut the box, it is of use, however, to know that the box is open; and to be convinced the more of this truth, let us make a general analyse of Christianity,

Christianity, and then observe, as generally, the rise, progress, and effects of theology.

SECT. V.

In the first place then, Christianity is founded on the universal law of nature. I will not say, that Christianity is a republication of it. But I will say, that the Gospel teaches the great and fundamental principle of this law, universal benevolence, recommends the precepts of it, and commands the observation of them in particular instances occasionally, always supposes them, always enforces them, and makes the law of right reason a law in every possible definition of the word beyond all cavil. I say beyond all cavil, because a great deal of silly cavil has been employed to perplex the plainest thing in nature, and the best determined signification of the words, according to the different occasions on which they are used.

I shall attempt, perhaps, at some other time, to expose more fully the solemn trifling that has been employed on this subject, if what will be here said should not be thought sufficient, as I believe it ought to be.

Without entering, therefore, into metaphysical and logical refinements, concerning fitnesses and unfitnesses, resulting from the supposed eternal relations of things, which determine, according to some writers, the will of God himself; without

amusing ourselves to distinguish between natural differences, that arise in this manner, and moral differences, that are said to arise from will alone, let us observe, that not only self-preservation, but a desire to be happy, are the immediate or improved effects of a natural instinct, the first in the whole animal kind, the last in the human species at least. As soon as men's appetites and passions are awake, they are determined by these to indulge every agreeable, and to abhor every disagreeable sensation; for pleasure which is temporary, and therefore not real happiness, passes for it, and is alone the object of appetite and passion. But as soon as their reason is formed, they discover the momentous difference between pleasure and happiness. Experience and reflection bring them acquainted with the system in which they are placed, and with the essential, I do not say eternal differences of things, according to the constitution of it, by which some tend to their pleasure, some to their happiness, some to both, aad some to neither; or to the very contrary, to pain and misery. By these consequences they distinguish natures, and on these essential differences reason establishes the principles necessary to promote and secure the human happiness of every individual in the happiness of society. These principles are called, very properly, the laws of nature; because, although it be true that the Supreme Being willed into existence this system, as he did every other, and by consequence all the relations of things contained in it, yet it

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is not this will that imposes in a state of nature, and among men who have no knowledge, perhaps, of their Creator; it is in truth the constitution of the system alone that imposes these laws on mankind originally, whatever power made the system, or supposing it to have been never made; and when they are thus imposed, they determine the will of our species as effectually, and oblige as strongly, as the most powerful principle of human nature can determine and oblige human creatures.

I do not say, that they have their effect absolutely, nor constantly. Appetite, passion, and the force of immediate objects, are often too hard for reason, even among those who hearken the most to her voice: and no wonder they should be so, since they are too hard for revelation. If the law of nature, collected by human reason from the essential differences of things, cannot procure a perfect obedience from those who profess themselves subject to it, without the assistance of civil laws and political institutions, nor even with this assistance; so may we see even in every Christian country, that the will of God, declared in his works, and in his word, cannot determine the rebellious will of man to conform to it in any near degree, even where it is enforced by the terrour of present, as well as future punishments, that are held out to the transgressors of it. If we consider effects, the law of nature is as much a law as the law of the Gospel, and creates as really an obligation in choice to prefer good to evil.

evil. If we consider original institution and authority, it will not indeed correspond in the mind of a Stratonick philosopher with his notion of a human law imposed by will, but he will be under no necessity of applying that notion to it. He may think, and call it a law imposed on him by the operations of a superior, though unintelligent power, the course of which he cannot alter, and must, therefore, conform himself to it, in order to be happy; and something of this kind even Grotius* was forced to allow, a little unwillingly, when he said——"et hæc quidem——locum ali-"quem haberent etiamsi daremus——non esse "Deum." The morality of actions does not, I think, consist in this, that they are prescribed by will, even the will of God; but in this, that they are the means, however imposed the practice of them may be, of acquiring happiness agreeable to our nature. Morality regards manners and the conduct of human life, and therefore I see as little reason to deny, that atheists may have knowledge of the morality of actions, as I do to deny, that the practice of this morality is enjoined by a law in the sense of obliging and binding; for if it should be said, that it cannot pass for a law in this sense, because every man's own reason imposes it on him, and he cannot be at once the obliger and the obliged, the binder and the bound, I should think the sophism scarce worthy of an answer; or should content

* De Jure Belli et Pacis: proleg. 2.

myself

myself to inform the sophister, that there may be obligation without a law by will, and a law by will without obligation, and then leave him to ponder on the matter.

But now, though the law of nature be a law in a strict and proper sense, and as really promulgated by God in his works as it would have been in his word, if he had spoke by men who frame and change definitions just as their different purposes require; yet is this law more completely, and more effectually such to a theist than to an atheist, and Mr. Bayle's famous paradox can never be received for truth by common sense, nor by good policy. The same use of sense and reason shows to both the constitution of nature, the essential differences of things, and the obligations that have the force of laws derived from thence. But the former rises from a knowledge of the phænomena to a knowledge of the God of nature, and in the law he discovers the lawgiver. The atheist sees it is his interest, the theist sees it is his duty, to observe this law, and he adores the divine wisdom and goodness, that have blended together so marvellously, and so graciously, his greatest interest and his greatest duty. Every kind of knowledge, whereof our nature is capable, combines to show the theist, that God speaks to man in his works, and signifies his will by them. He can neither be in doubt whether it is God who speaks, nor be at a loss to understand the divine language. An atheist, who has much imagination, much elevation of mind, and a great warmth of inward sentiment, may, perhaps, contemplate

contemplate the differences of things in abstract consideration, and contrast the beauty of virtue and the deformity of vice, till he falls in love, if I may use the expression after Tully, with the former, and grows to abhor every appearance of the latter. He may create, in this manner, in himself, as it were, an artificial moral sense; for to assume any such natural instinct is as absurd as to assume innate ideas, or any other of the Platonick whimsies. But how much more lively must this sense be in the theist, who knows not only, that virtue is the perfection of his nature, but that he conforms himself by the practice of it to the designs of Infinite Wisdom, and co-operates in some sort with the Almighty?

As a knowledge of the essential differences of things may lead men who know not God, to a knowledge of the morality of actions, so do these essential differences serve as so many clews by which the theist may guide himself through all the intricacies of errour and of disputation, to a knowledge of the will of God. Since Infinite Wisdom, that must always proportion means to ends, has made happiness the end or instinctive object of all his human creatures; and has so constituted them, and the system in which he has placed them, that they can neither attain to this happiness, nor be secure in the possession of it by any other means than the practice of morality, or the social virtues; it is demonstrated, that God wills we should pursue these means to arrive at this end. We know more certainly the will of God

God in this way, than we can know it in any other. We may take the word of man for the word of God, and, in fact, this has been, and is still the case of many. But we can never mistake the works of God for the works of men, and may be, therefore, assured, that a revelation, evidently manifested in them, is a divine revelation. But though natural religion is an object of knowledge, and all other religions, even that of the Gospel, can rest on nothing more than probability, yet may that probability be such as will and ought to force our assent. He, therefore, who thinks, that the Christian religion is founded on such a probability, may affirm, that the Gospel, though he does not think it, in propriety of speech, a republication, is a confirmation of the law of nature, and renders this a law beyond all cavil about the term.

Sanctions of this law are implied in the theistical system; because it assumes, and to be sure very justly, that the general happiness or misery of mankind depends on the observation of this law, and that the degrees of one and the other bear always a proportion to the exercise and to the neglect of publick and private virtue, in every community. But these motives are such as particular men will be apt to think do not immediately, nor directly concern them, because they are apt to consider themselves as individuals, rather than as members of society, and to catch at pleasure without any regard to happiness. To give an additional strength, therefore, to these motives,

motives, that are determining in their own nature, but not so according to the imperfection of ours; decisive to our reason, but not so to our appetites and passions, the ancient theists and polytheists, philosophers or legislators, invented another; that, I mean, of future rewards and punishments represented under various forms, but always directed to the same purpose. This motive, every man who believes it, may, and must apply to himself, and hope the reward, and fear the punishment, for his secret as well as his publick actions. What effect this motive had in remote antiquity we cannot say, but it had lost it's force long before the institution of Christianity. The fear of Hell particularly was ridiculed by some of the greatest moralists; and to show how little it was kept up in the minds of the vulgar, we may observe, that Tully * treated it in some of his publick pleadings as he would have avoided scrupulously to do, whatever he thought of it himself, if this fear had been at that time prevalent even among the vulgar.

Though future rewards and punishments are

* ——— quid tandem illi mali mors attulit? nisi forte ineptiis et fabulis ducimur, ut existimemus apud inferos impiorum supplicia perferre. —— actum esse præcipitem in sceleratorum sedem atque regionem. Quæ si falsa sunt, id quod omnes intelligunt; quid ei tandem aliud mors eripuit, præter sensum doloris? pro Cluentio. ——— Ut aliqua in vitâ formido improbis esset posita, apud inferos ejusmodi quædam illi antiqui supplicia impiis constituta esse voluerunt: quod videlicet intelligebant, his remotis, non esse mortem ipsam pertimescendam. Orat. 4, in Catilin.

not

not original nor direct sanctions of the law of nature, because not coeval with it, yet they became such when the christian revelation was made. They are original sanctions of Christianity, and Christianity, which includes, was designed to enforce, the law of nature. We may, therefore, be allowed to wonder, and to seek the reason, why the law of nature, thus enforced, has served so little to correct the manners of men, and to promote the peace and happiness of the world? Why Christianity has served, on the contrary, to determine men to violate the very law it confirms, and has opened a new source of mischief wherever it has prevailed? I said above, that theology is in fault, not religion. We shall see this verified in every part of the analyse we make of Christianity. A few reflections will show it to be so in this part, where we consider the Gospel as a system of natural religion.

SECT. VI.

THE law of nature then, or natural religion, as it is the most important, is the plainest of all laws; and if the Heavens do not declare the will, as well as the glory of God, according to an observation my Lord Bacon* makes in a chapter, that contains some of the idols of the den, and of the theatre particularly, sure I am, that the Earth, and

* De Aug. Scien. lib. 9, chap. 1.

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the inhabitants of it, declare both. The will of God has been revealed in his works to all those who have applied themselves to the contemplation of them, even to those who did not discover him in them, from the time that men have used their reason; and where reason improved, and knowledge increased, morality was carried as high in speculation, and in practice too, by some of the heathen worthies, as by any of the Christian saints; even as high as the very precept which the chancellor * quotes, and which he declares, a little rashly, to be more than human, and above the light of nature, since it was taught by some who had no other light. Notwithstanding this, divines, who cannot bear, that the will, any more than the existence, of God should be deduced from his works, the clearest and the most authentick of all revelations, affirm, against fact and reason both, that men may have, indeed, some true notions of virtue and vice, and of good and evil, by the light of nature, but that the moral law is too sublime for reason to attain to every part of it; and, on this affirmation, a great deal of theological policy has been established. Thus they give too another instance of their inconsistency, for nothing is more common than to find in their writings, nay in the course of the same argument, the religion of na-

* Diligite inimicos; benefacite his qui oderunt vos—quæ certe verba plausum illum merentur, nec vox hominem sonat; si quidem vox est, quæ lumen naturæ superat. ib.

ture

ture extolled as a perfect, and vilified as a most imperfect system. Had these reverend persons been content to teach the duties of natural religion with evangelical simplicity, as Christ himself did, in his Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere, they might have taught additional duties, and theological virtues apart; and they might have enforced the whole, if they had pleased, by the Heaven they promised, and by the Hell they threatened.

Thus they might have preserved natural religion in the genuine purity of it. Instead of perplexing and corrupting it, they might have enabled every one to be his own casuist, and have made good men as well as Christians. But this method, which would have enlarged the kingdom of God, would not have enlarged, nor fortified, the theological empire. To do this the more effectually, it was necessary to maintain the insufficiency of human reason, though God thought it so sufficient, that he left the whole race of mankind, a few patriarchs and the chosen seed excepted, several thousand years under no other conduct. It was necessary to boast the necessity of a revelation, that might supply the defects of reason, though this revelation remains, and has remained, from the time it was made, unknown to the far greatest part of mankind. It was necessary to make even the moral law a mystery, and such a mystery as could not be, on many occasions, unveiled, without a profound knowledge of theology; which is a science, that their order has

imagined, and has reserved to itself. In this respect the Christian priesthood has been wiser than the Heathen. The Heathen priests were wholly employed in teaching silly ceremonies, and celebrating the pompous rites of superstitious worship. They left the care of teaching the principles, and inculcating the obligations of morality, to philosophers; at least in the times with which we are best acquainted, this was the state of religion among the pagans. But from the most early days of Christianity, it has not been thus in the Christian Church. The persons, whom we repute commissioned to instruct others in revealed religion, have assumed the sole right of deciding in all cases concerning natural religion, that is, in almost all the most important affairs of publick and private life.

By these means, and by these men, the moral law has been so intermixed with theology, and both of them have been so extended, and so perplexed, that the two plainest things in the world, and which would not have been fitted to the purpose of them, nor by consequence worthy of their author, if they had not been plain, the law of nature and the law of grace, have been rendered voluminous, intricate, and contentious, to such a degree, that the life of man is scarce long enough to attain a knowledge of them. Divines, who are supposed to have this knowledge, are therefore consulted like oracles; and till their decisions, like those of the others, and for some of the same reasons, began to lose their credit, their

authority

authority in the direction of private conscience was absolute, and extended from the prince to the peasant, who were alike under their influence. When they had decoyed mankind out of the plain into a wood, they who had planted the wood were necessary guides in it. Much ill use has been made of this authority, and much colour given by it to the objection against religion, which we consider here. So much, that I apprehend there is no way to do right to Christianity, but that of imputing, as we do, consequences, that cannot be denied, to the corruption of religion by theology. This corruption has gone so far, that although it be of the last absurdity to affirm, that any law can alter, much less contradict, that of nature, yet have men presumed to dispense with the observations of this law, to distinguish it away, to decide in direct opposition to it, and shamelessly to advance, that the bishop of your church, for instance, has a power to alter the very nature of things. "Jure potest contra jus "decernere." Nay, Bellarmin presumed to say, that if a pope should enjoin vices and forbid virtues, the Christian church would be obliged to believe vices good and virtues evil, or would sin against conscience. "Nisi vellet contra con-"scientiam peccare." Bellarm. de Pont.

Moral theology, which contains a superethical doctrine, as some grave divines have ridiculously called it, rendered the system of ethicks in the writings of the ancient fathers, and doctors of the Christian church, more confused, less con-

sistent, and often less moral, than we find it established in those of the Heathen, although no system can be more simple and plain than this of natural religion as it stands in the Gospel. I do not pretend to criticise the Offices of St. Ambrose, though he was a saint not very unlike our Becket; but I will suppose, that no man presumes to compare them, in any respect, to those of Tully; and I will advance, that Tully would have blushed to own some of the moral doctrines of St. Austin, though St. Austin was, after St. Paul, the great author of theological systems. This abuse of reason, and of revelation both, was never pushed so extravagantly, however, as it was by the school divines. These men, who sate ruminating in their cells on the very little they knew by experience and observation, and whose minds, therefore, were void of the true materials of knowledge, worked up, in place of them, all the "entia rationis," chimeras of imagination, that have no subsistence out of it, and pass under the name of metaphysicks; all the useless definitions, frivolous distinctions, vain subtilties, and captious arguments of logick. By them, casuistry came into vogue, which has been called in French, "l'art de chicaner avec Dieu:" as logick has been called, "l'art de chicaner avec "les hommes;" and we may call the whole tribe, as Buchanan called the Scotch and Irish scholasticks particularly,

"Gens ratione furens, et mentem pasta chi-
"mæris."

Some divines have made men enthusiasts, by straining the obligations of natural and revealed religion both so high, that they become almost inconceivable, and quite impracticable. Others again, scholastick divines and casuists especially, have so relaxed all these, and taught men so many ways of compounding, as it were, with God, that they are left at liberty, on many occasions, to indulge the excess of their passions. According to the first, a good Christian is an ideal man, that never existed out of idea, as much as the sage of the stoicks. According to the last, the worst of men may be good Christians on Earth, and saints in Heaven. In short, they have divided the two laws, that are intimately united in the Gospel, have set them in opposition, and have very often made the violations of one pass for lawful means of promoting the other. The natural effect of religion is to help reason to subdue our passions, and of theology to help the passions to subdue reason and religion both, not only by indulgence to them, but by irritating the worst and most furious of them. History is full of such examples; and irreligious persons make use of them, unjustly, against Christianity.

SECT. VII.

THERE are two other parts beside this of natural religion, into which Christianity may be analysed, and which have been corrupted alike

by theology. Duties superadded to those of the former, and articles of belief, that reason neither could discover, nor can comprehend. As impracticable as some, and as incredible as others may seem, the duties required to be practised, and the propositions required to be believed, are concise and plainly enough expressed in the Gospel, in the original Gospel properly so called, which Christ taught, and which his four Evangelists recorded. But they have been rendered, since they were first published, and they began to be so as soon as they were published, extremely voluminous and intricate. The duties, external duties at least, have been multiplied by ecclesiastical policy, that profitted of the natural superstition of mankind. The articles of belief have been multiplied, and complicated by cabalistical notions taken from the Jews, and by metaphysical refinements, taken from Heathen theology. Children suffer often for the sins of their fathers. But in this case the rule is inverted. The Gospel gave birth to Christian theology, and the Gospel suffers for the sins of her licentious offspring; of that ecclesiastical order, I mean, who, affecting to be called the religious, have proved themselves to be the most irreligious society that ever was formed, and the most hurtful too, as he who compares, through the whole series of their own history, the little good, with the infinite mischief they have done, must confess.

It is common, and yet astonishing, to observe with how much solemnity and confidence almost all those, who teach and defend Christianity, presume

sume to affirm any thing, though never so evidently false, that they imagine may serve to recommend it, and how by these means they do hurt, even where they intend to do good. They do hurt, most certainly, to the cause of religion; and the end is, in this case, so far from sanctifying the means, that the means disgrace the end. One artifice, that they employ continually, is to confound, as much as they can, the want of power in the Heathen world to reform the manners of men, by promoting effectually the practice of natural religion, and the want of a sufficient knowledge of this religion. That the heathen sages wanted this power is true, and that the apostles, saints, and doctors of Christianity have not had it, even with the help of a particular revelation, is true likewise; but it is as false to say, that the former had not a sufficient knowledge of natural religion, as it would be to say, that Christians have it not. The great book of nature lies open before us, and our natural reason enables us to read in it. Whatever it may contain, that cannot be thus read, cannot be called natural religion, with any precision of ideas, or propriety of words; nor will the example, that has been brought, of men who assent readily to truths consonant to their reason, which they receive from others, and would have found it hard to discover themselves, be made applicable to the present case, so as to destroy the distinction. Mr. Locke should have seen this sooner than any man, and one would think a reflection

so obvious should escape no man. He did not, or he would not, make it. He seems to me, in the latter part of his treatise concerning the Reasonableness of Christianity, not only to confound the want of sufficient means to propagate, and the want of sufficient means to know the religion of nature, but to play so loosely in his expressions between this religion and the christian, that it is hard to distinguish, sometimes, what he intends; whether he intends means of propagating, or means of knowing; to what sense he confines natural, and to what revealed religion. Thus much, however, is very clear: he asserts the insufficiency of "human reason, unassisted by "revelation, in it's great and proper business of "morality. Human reason," he says, "never "made out an intire body of the law of nature "from unquestionable principles, or by clear "deductions. Scattered sayings——incoherent "apophthegms of philosophers and wise men—— "could never make a morality——could never "rise to the force of a law." These assertions now are in part, and in part only, true. But when he comes to contrast this supposed imperfect knowledge of the religion of nature, which the Heathen had, with that supposed perfect knowledge, which is communicated by the Gospel, what he advances stands in direct contradiction to truth. It is not true, that Christ revealed an intire body of ethicks, proved to be the law of nature from principles of reason, and reaching all the duties of life. If mankind wanted such a code,

code, to which recourse might be had on every occasion, as to an unerring rule in every part of the moral duties, such a code is still wanting; for the Gospel is not such a code. Moral obligations are occasionally recommended and commanded in it, but no where proved from principles of reason, and by clear deductions, unless allusions, parables and comparisons, and promises and threats, are to pass for such. Were all the precepts of this kind, that are scattered about in the whole New Testament, collected, like the short sentences of ancient sages in the memorials we have of them, and put together in the very words of the sacred writers, they would compose a very short, as well as unconnected system of ethicks. A system thus collected from the writings of ancient heathen moralists, of Tully, of Seneca, of Epictetus, and others, would be more full, more intire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unquestionable principles of knowledge. Nor must we think, that this takes off from the dignity, the authority, or the utility, even in moral doctrines, of revealed religion. The law of nature was sufficiently known, and the teachers of it, who made no pretence to any divine mission, had pressed it on the minds and consciences of mankind, the sole way they could press it, by arguments drawn from the reason of things. Revelation was not given to do what reason could do alone. It was not given to convince men of the reasonableness of morality, but

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to enforce the practice of it by a superior authority.

If there was any thing like a complete system of morality in the Gospel, we should find it in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew, since they contain a sermon preached by Christ himself, not on any one particular doctrine, but on the whole duty of man. What now do we find in them? Many excellent precepts of morality, no doubt, intermingled with, and enforced by several considerations, drawn from his own revelations; and yet such as the law of nature enjoins, or implies, and as have been practised by philosophers, and other good men among the heathen. Some of these, and some others, that we find interspersed in the Gospels, are such as may be reckoned of the kind of those which St. Austin calls "sublimiora præcepta," not so much positive duties, as instances of greater purity and christian perfection, and rather recommended than commanded. Thus, for instance, wherever marriage has been instituted, adultery has been forbid. It was so by the Mosaick law, it is so by the law of nature; for though marriage be not directly instituted by this law, yet every wrong, every invasion of another man's property, and every injustice is forbid by it. Now the Gospel carries this duty much farther, and declares, that "whosoever looketh on a woman, to lust after her, "hath committed adultery with her already in his "heart." The law, that forbids the commission of a crime, does certainly imply, that we should not

not desire to commit it; for to want the desire, or to be able to extinguish it, is the best security of our obedience; though he who is unable to extinguish it, and yet abstains from the sin, has, in the eye of reason, a greater degree of merit. Reason commanded what a man may by the force of reason perform. Revelation commands what it is impossible to obey, without an assistance unknown to reason. Thus again, murder is forbid by the law of nature, but even anger is forbid by this; and universal benevolence, that great principle of the first, is strained by the last to a love of our enemies and persecutors: a precept so sublime, that I doubt whether it was ever exactly observed, any more under the law of grace, than under the law of nature, though some appearances of it may be found, perhaps, under both, and at least as many under one as under the other. These sublime precepts, which are peculiarly christian, and seem designed to characterise Christianity, have not been observed by the professors of it, either ancient or modern. The Quaker, who says yea, yea, and nay, nay, and doth not swear at all, doth not willingly part with his coat as well as his cloak, nor give away one because the other hath been taken from him; neither does the good man neglect to lay up some treasures on Earth, where moth and rust corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. It has occurred to me often, that the same reason may be given for these sublime precepts, which Tully gives somewhere for the severer doctrines

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of the Stoicks. Men will always stop short of that pitch of virtue, which is proposed to them, and it is, therefore, right to carry the notions of it as high as possible. Whether this reason will be admitted or no, I cannot tell. It seems to me the best that can be given, "et valeat quantum "valere potest." In all cases these sublime precepts are so little inconsistent with the law of nature, that they are this very law carried beyond the original terms of it.

There are, beside these general duties, and others of the same kind, commanded or recommended by the Gospel, some that seem directed to the Jews only, and some that seem directed more immediately to the disciples of Christ. Of the first sort is, that injunction which restrains divorces to the case of adultery; whereas by the law of Moses, as well as by those of other legislators, a man who did not like his wife, nor care to cohabit with her, might give her a letter of divorce, and turn her out of his doors; for which express leave is given in Deuteronomy *. Of the same sort are those directions which tend to render the worship of God more intellectual, and the practice of good works less ostentatious. The Heathen fasted and prayed, and exercised charity as well as the Jews. But the divine worship of both consisted in a multitude of external duties, and in pompous rites and ceremonies; and the Jews are taxed particularly with hypocrisy,

* Chap. xxiv.

and

and with an affectation of doing acts of charity in publick, in the streets, and in the synagogues, in order to gratify their vanity, and to be applauded by the publick. Of the second sort are certain duties enjoined in this sermon, and in other parts of the Gospel, which seem fit enough for a religious sect, or order of men like the Essenians, but are by no means practicable in the general society of mankind. To resist no injury, to take no care for to morrow, to neglect providing for the common necessaries of life, and to sell all to follow Christ, might be properly exacted from those who were his companions, and his disciples in a stricter sense, like the scholars of Pythagoras, admitted within the curtain; but reason and experience both show, that, considered as general duties, they are impracticable, inconsistent with natural instinct, as well as law, and quite destructive of society. They have not been, therefore, considered as such. They have been laid aside, and nothing more than a pretended observation of them has been kept up by some of the monastick orders.

If this now be, as it is most certainly, a true, though general and short representation of the moral duties contained in the Gospel, and added to those of natural religion, both which consist in piety towards God, and benevolence towards man, will any disciple of the philosopher of Malmesbury presume to maintain, that the objection raised against religion has the least force on account of them, or that they render it inconsistent with

with civil sovereignty? He who should maintain it, would fall below notice, and not deserve an answer. But if the objection be levelled against the numberless duties superadded to those of the Gospel, instead of being levelled against the few, that have been superadded by the Gospel to those of natural religion, it will be unanswerable. Those of the former sort have been so increased, especially in matters of rites, of ceremonies, and of external devotion, by the authority of the Church, and in the course of ages, that they overload and stifle, as it were, true religion; nay, that they substitute in lieu of it a carnal religion, such as that of the Jews, and those of Paganism were. That the religion instituted by Moses was such in outward appearance, "in frontispicio quidem," says Spencer, our divines admit. But they assert, that inwardly, "in penetrali," it was divine and mystick. The Heathen said the same of theirs; and in truth, if theirs were not very divine, they were very mystical. Christianity has completed the round, and has been brought back, in many countries at least, from the simplicity of the Gospel to the pageantry and superstition of the Heathen and Jewish observances.

The sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper are certainly divine ceremonies, since they were instituted by Christ himself; and they may be said to be mystical too, because they are intended to be visible signs of something invisible. Baptism, or washing, is necessary to cleanliness and health, in warm countries especially. But it was soon adopted by those who instituted religions,

gions, and applied it to inward, as well as outward purification. It was so among the Heathen, it was so among the Jews, it is so at this day among the idolaters in the Indostan, and among the Mahometans. The Heathen had their publick and private purifications, and we know, by other proofs beside the acknowledgment of St. Austin, that baptism was one of them. We know too, that the pagan ceremonies of purification had a spiritual meaning, and were intended to keep up a sense of religion in the minds of men. "Castè "jubet lex adire ad Deos," says Tully*, "animo "videlicet —— nec tollit castimoniam corporis." The Jews employed several kinds of baptism. They baptised even their household goods. Every kind had a mystical signification, and the proselytes to the law of Moses, who were baptised as well as circumcised, were understood to be regenerated as well as purified. The proselyte became a new man by this ceremony, retained nothing of his former state, and even his parents ceased to be reputed such. The precursor of Christ instituted a baptism of repentance; and even Christ himself, who had not certainly any need of repentance, insisted to be baptised in the Jordan, as he was, after some modest resistance on the part of John. He was not only baptised before he began his mission: but he instituted this ceremony at the close of it, when he ordered his disciples to "baptise all nations in the name "of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

* Lib. 2. de Legib.

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The communion, or the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is another, and the only other religious ceremony instituted by the same divine authority. We hear something of symbols of bread, and symbols of the cup, which cup was of water, that were used in the mysteries of Mithras, and in others. There is, I think, no room to suspect that the christian communion bore any allusion to those rites in it's institution, whatever it did afterward. But the Jews had their passover, and in imitation of that feast, as well as on occasion of it, Christ instituted his supper. One was designed to preserve the memory of the Exode, before which a destroying angel passed over the houses of the Israelites, and put the first-born of the Egyptians to death. The other was designed to preserve the memory of the death of Christ, which was then near, which he assured his disciples had been foretold by the prophets, and would be effectual to the redemption of mankind, and to the remission of sin. No institutions can be imagined more simple, nor more void of all those pompous rites and theatrical representations, that abounded in the religious worship of the Heathen and the Jews, than these two were in their origin. They were not only innocent, but profitable ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, by keeping up that of christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the revelation that confirmed them. But they were soon perverted by the fathers of the church,

church, who trusted so little to the providence of God for the propagation of this religion, that they employed the lowest tricks of human policy for the purpose. They added another stage of external observances, if I may say so, in the progress of converts to christianity, and modelled the ceremonies of it on the plan of those heathen mysteries, against which they declaimed so bitterly; for the good men were apt to be bitter, as well as inconsistent. Baptism was the ceremony of purgation that preceded initiation. Neither children nor others were admitted to it, till by exorcisms, and the blowing of the priests upon them, the impure spirits were driven from them. Blowing was the first, washing the second part of this purgation. They who had gone through both were fitted to receive the influences of grace. They were the catechumens, the initiated, who partook of the first and least mysteries: and the complete or perfect Christians were those, who not only partook of the greatest, the communion, but were let into the whole secret of it. This third stage was that of consummation, according to christian as well as heathen theology: and it would scarce be possible to believe, that the greatest saints and doctors of the church had talked so much blasphemous nonsense, and employed so much artifice about it, if their writings were not extant, and if we did not see in them, that deification in another life was promised to those who received the christian sacraments with faith; as it had been promised to those who went piously through all

the mysterious ceremonies of heathenism. It would be scarce possible to believe, that even Athanasius, as well known as he is by his creed, and by other circumstances, could have had the front to assert, that men are united to the Godhead by a participation of the spirit, "participa-"tione spiritûs conjungimur deitati;" which participation is the effect of these sacraments, of that particularly, which was called "magnum et pa-"vendum mysterium," and the sacrament "emi-"nentiæ gratiæ," as it was then, and as it is at this hour. It would be tedious to descend into a greater detail here. If you have a mind at any time to do so, you may consult, among other writings, the sixteenth exercitation of Casaubon against Baronius, where you will find enough to satisfy your curiosity, and more than enough to raise your surprise. All I shall say more concerning these two religious ceremonies, instituted by Christ, is this; baptism has been kept at no very great distance from the simplicity of it's original, and the little alteration that has been made, leaving it as much a sign as it was before, and, no doubt, as effectual as it was before to every other purpose, renders the ceremony more decent, by sprinkling only with water, according to the practice of the western churches, than it would be by a total immersion, according to that of the primitive church, and of the oriental churches, if I mistake not, even at this time. But the other institution has been so disguised by ornament, and so much directed, in your church at least, to a dif-

a different purpose from commemoration, that, if the disciples were to assemble at Easter in the chapel of his holiness, Peter would know his successor as little as Christ would acknowledge his vicar, and the rest would be unable to guess what the ceremony represented, or intended.

It would be still more tedious to descend into an enumeration of all the impositions, which the church has laid on the christian world. New powers, new rites, new duties, new sins, new ceremonies, new observances to be practised, from the birth to the death of every man, all tending to the profit of the clergy, none founded on the plain authority, and many established in direct contradiction to the spirit, and to the letter of the Gospel. Judaism and Paganism gave occasion to them. They were derived from thence. They are no parts of the christian system. Christ had no share in their institution. The manner, indeed, in which the Gospel was published, and much more the manner in which it was propagated, might lead designing, enthusiastical, and superstitious men, to graft all these foreign branches on the stock of genuine christianity. Christ himself was, in outward appearance, a Jew. He ordered his disciples, and the crowds that followed him, to observe and do whatever the Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in the chair of Moses, should direct *. He only warned them against the examples that these men gave, who

* Matt. chap. xxiii.

did not practise what they taught, "dicunt enim "et non faciunt." He was a better Jew than they, and he exhorted others to be the same. It is true, that he commissioned his apostles to teach and baptise all nations*, when he gave them his last instructions. But he meaned no more, perhaps, by all nations, than the Jews dispersed into all nations, since he had before that time forbid them to go into the ways of the Gentiles, and into the cities of the Samaritans †. He sent them rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and declared this in a very remarkable manner to be the object of his own mission, by the language he held to the Canaanite woman. She endeavoured, in vain, to move his compassion. He told her it was not fit to take the bread of the children and give it to the dogs ‡: nor did he relent and cure her daughter, till he was overcome by her importunity and her faith.

These declarations of Jesus, before his crucifixion, and the charge he gave to his disciples after his resurrection, might embarrass them a little, and might cause some difference of opinion among them at their first setting out. So it happened: and though a predilection for the Jews, and a strong attachment to the observances of the law, might have been expected from St. Paul, a zealous Pharisee, who had been bred at the feet of Gamaliel, rather than from St. Peter, a poor ignorant fisherman; yet St. Paul distinguished

* Ibid. xxviii. † Ibid. x. ‡ Ibid. xv.

himself

himself as the apostle of the Gentiles, and alleged, that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto him, as the Gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter *. It is probable, that the first had made a reflection early, and had seen it confirmed by experience, as soon as he entered on his apostolical mission, that escaped the second. The reflection, I mean, is this, that the contempt and aversion in which both the nation and the religion of the Jews were held by the rest of mankind would make it much more easy to convert the Gentiles at once to Christianity, than to make them Jews first, in order to make them Christians afterward. The council of the apostles and the elders at Jerusalem, to which Paul and Barnabas were deputed from Antioch, where the dispute about circumcising the gentile converts had been carried even into mutiny, was of the same mind. Nay, St. Peter † himself spoke on that side of the question, how much soever he trimmed when St. Paul withstood him to his face ‡, and reproved him for his dissimulation, and the bad example he gave.

It is evident, that indulgence to the Jews and the Gentiles, in order to gain both, was a fundamental principle of apostolical conduct from the first preaching of the Gospel. Peter conversed and eat with the Gentiles at Antioch, till the arrival of certain Jews made him separate himself from the former, fearing them which were of

* Gal. ii. † Acts xv. ‡ Gal. ii.

the circumcision: and Paul, who reproached this prince of the apostles so harshly for his hypocrisy, if he did not dissemble to the elders the doctrine he taught to the Gentiles, did at least dissemble so far to the publick, when he came to Jerusalem and joined in the most solemn act, that the most rigid observers of the law could perform, as to express a zeal for observance he did not much value, and for a law he thought abrogated; for that was the case, and that doctrine is inculcated throughout his Epistles. In short, he carried his indulgence so far, or he dissembled so far, that he became as a Jew to the Jews, that he might gain the Jews, and to them that are without law, that is, to the Gentiles, as without law, that he might gain them too*. We have his own word for this, and he boasts of it.

By such prudent conduct, the Gospel was successfully propagated, and converts flocked apace into the pale of Christianity from these different and opposite quarters; from which it is no wonder that they brought along with them several of their former usages, rites, and ceremonies.

Abstinence from things strangled and from blood had been constantly observed by the Jews, and was one of the conditions imposed by the christian church on the Gentiles received into it. This condition was confirmed by the apostolical constitutions, and enforced, I believe, by penalties more severe, in some of the imperial. It remain-

* 1 Cor. chap. ix.

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ed long in general practice among the Christians of the East, and is perhaps even now practised by several of those churches. But in the West it was soon abandoned, and will not be revived again by the zeal of our acquaintance, Dr. Delany. Abstinence likewise from all kinds of nourishment, or the most rigorous fasting on solemn occasions, had been observed in the Jewish church, and is observed still by the Christian churches of the East; for as to those of the West, they cannot be said to fast, when their manner is compared with that of the others, or with that of the Mahometans: they may be said rather to feast very often, and only to change one kind of luxury for another.

These observances were of mere Pagan or Jewish original. Others were of a mixed kind. Moses had made the destruction of idolatrous worship a principal object of his law; and the zeal against images was great among the Jews. But they made a distinction, which the casuists of the Upper Egypt did not make, I presume, formerly; and which those of Mecca would not admit now. Images carved or embossed were held in horrour, but a flat figure, either painted or embroidered, was allowed. A passage, which I have read, quoted from Maimonides *, is very

* Lud. Com. ad His. Æthiop. Sed hoc capiendum de imagine, quæ protuberat, quales sunt figuræ ac sculpturæ in palatiis, et his similes. Talem igitur si quis fecerit, vapulat. Sin autem figura sit depressa, vel coloribus expressa, uti illæ quæ in tabulis mensisvè fiunt, aut quæ intextæ operi textorio, pro licitis habentur.

express and very clear on this subject. Pictures being thus introduced from Judaism, statues soon followed from the Pagan worship: and the western churches, if not the eastern, who keep more nearly to the Jewish customs, were furnished like Heathen temples. Confession of sins was in use among the Heathen, so it was among the Jews; so it was, and so it is, among Christians, and several forms of it have been prescribed. Penance and expiation followed, both in the Pagan and Jewish churches: they were derived into the Christian, and they have been often costly in all three. One sort of penance obtained in the two last indeed, which I do not remember to have obtained in the first, that of flagellation: a sort of penance which has been since applied, as the learned Meibomius assures us, to a very different and unholy purpose. In the synagogue it is said, that the penitents flogged one another, but your church, like a more indulgent mother, allows every one to flog himself, and to proportion the penance to the tenderness of his conscience, and the tenderness of his skin.

But to what purpose should I mention any more of these particulars? A multitude of such ceremonies, not to say superstitious rites, have been adopted by the Christian church, though neither commanded, nor even recommended, by the Gospel. For this reason, the apostles do not seem to have been very intent about these, or any other forms of external service. They seem to have distinguished rightly between the end and the means:

means: the end immutable, as a religion given by God must necessarily be: the discipline, or means of supporting it, mutable, as the ordinances of men must be, according to the vicissitude of circumstances, and the fluctuation of human affairs. But their successors did, and have done ever since, the very reverse of this, and it is astonishing to observe what a bustle they made, and what contests they had about the time of keeping Easter, and other points of discipline and ceremony, which the apostles had not thought of importance enough to deserve their decision, nor even their notice. All these fluctuated, therefore, extremely in the same churches, and varied in different churches, during the first ages of Christianity, and especially until the synagogue was honourably buried *, if it can be said to be so even at this day. I interpose this doubt, not only because their remains a tang of Judaism among several of the eastern sects, which will not appear strange to those who know, that the Christian church of Jerusalem judaised during a succession of fifteen bishops, but because the western sect, your pretended Catholick church, instead of asserting evangelical freedom from the bondage of the Mosaical law, or rather while she asserts it, has introduced many things from this very law, and has the front to justify them on the authority of it, under a new dispensation, that takes all autho-

* ——Donec synagoga honorificè sepulta fuerit. Card. Bon. de Rebus Litur. l. 1.

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rity from it, according to St. Paul, Ointment, holy water, incense, tapers, the consecration of altars, and the celebration of jubilees, are of this kind. But I think that your doctors would not sound so high this authority, if these things were alone concerned. There are others which import them more, and which they have been obliged to establish on Jewish authority, for want of any better; and it is for the sake of such institutions, that they have deemed it expedient to accustom men to respect this authority on other occasions, on such particularly as relate to the immediate service of God, of which custom, not reason nor revelation most certainly, has made them to pass for essential parts. The divine right of tithes was established by the law of Moses. By virtue of that law, the christian priesthood claim it. The nasci was the pontiff of the Jews, and the head of their church. From hence an argument the more for the supreme authority of the pope. Councils are derived from the Sanhedrin, and the whole system of the hierarchy and of ecclesiastical regimen from the constitution of the Jewish church. I take no notice here of the share which paganism had in all that has been mentioned, either immediately or mediately through Judaism. Enough is said for my present purpose; and observations of that sort will be more necessary under another head.

Let those now, who object to religion on account of external duties, rites, ceremonies, and ecclesiastical institutions, learn to be more just in

in their censures. Let them learn to distinguish rightly between those things which the Gospel requires, and those which the church imposes. If they do not make this distinction, their objections are trifling: and if they do make it, they may have the concurrence of every sincere and intelligent Christian along with them; for reasons which are not theirs indeed, since they are intended to strengthen and confirm, not to weaken nor explode religion. When we consider how strong the impressions of sense are, and how they are apt to control that which should control them, we may find, perhaps, very sufficient reason to incline us to approve in general the use of ceremonies, and the pomp of external service in religion. To keep up a sense of it in the minds of men, there seem to be but two ways. To strike the senses frequently by publick and solemn acts of religious worship, and to heat the brain by notions of an inward operation of the spirit, and of a sort of mystical devotion independent of outward forms, or even inconsistent with them. One of these leads to superstition, the other to enthusiasm. Both are silly; but the last is bad in this respect: it is less governable and less curable. Superstition is folly. Enthusiasm is madness. It is good to be on our guard against both. But I am to speak in this place of the first alone, and as to that, the solemn magnificence of a church, the grave and moving harmony of musick, the pomp and order of ceremonies decently performed, the composed looks, and the mystical vestments

vestments of the priests who perform them, all this, I think, cannot fail to inspire an awful respect, and to maintain a devout attention of mind in the generality. Here and there a man, perhaps, may take these ceremonies, and those who perform them, for what they are, and not be imposed upon by them, either before or after the celebration of such rites as these. But during the celebration of them, while the spectacle is before his eyes, and the sound in his ears, I think that the same impressions will be made in some degree even on such a man as this. You and I knew Betterton and Mrs. Barry off the stage, as well as on it, and yet I am persuaded neither of us could ever see Jaffier and Belvidera without horrour and compassion. I do not pretend to decide in the dispute about the pomp of external service. I only speak according to what I have felt. But though I do not take part, on the whole, for the use or disuse of church ceremonies, it may be allowed me to declare against the abuse of them all, as a friend, not as an enemy to religion. It is certain that this abuse has defeated the very end to which they were directed, or which served as a reason for the introduction of them, and has substituted something, which is not religion, in the place of it. Our spiritual guides have run into wild extremes. Some have showed a great disregard to good works, and have talked of justifying faith alone, as the sole means of salvation, and in contradistinction to good works, like the Scotch presbyterian parson, who assured

assured his brethren from the pulpit, that immorality had destroyed it's thousands, but morality it's ten thousands. Others have insisted much on good works, but they have confounded the nature of them. They have rather meaned, by good works, the practice of arbitrary duties, which ecclesiastical discipline has established, or ecclesiastical authority recommended, and which are beggarly elements indeed, than the practice of those moral duties, which reason prescribes, as well as revelation. How much they prefer the former to the latter, may appear by the universal practice of most christian countries. In some, the man who stabs his enemy goes to confession, and his conscience is never quiet, till he has purchased absolution by money, or by penance, or by both. The woman who lies in the arms of her adulterer will leap out of bed, and knock her forehead, and beat her breast, at the tinkling of a little bell in the street. Nay in the country where I have passed so many years of my life, where bigotry is less prevalent, generally speaking, than in others of the same communion, the poor man who has eat an egg in Lent, when eggs have not been permitted by the bishop, and who had perhaps nothing else to eat, cannot be absolved by the same priest that might absolve him for neglecting the worship, or offending against the law of God. The former sin is of a blacker dye than these, and he must have recourse for absolution to a higher authority; which is an imitation of the Jews likewise, among whom any offence against the ritual law

law was punished more severely than crimes much more grievous in their nature, as I believe it has been observed already after Dr. Spencer. But enough has been said concerning duties added by the Gospel to natural religion, and duties added by the church to those of both. It is time to speak of articles of faith, which make a third and last part of the analyse of christianity.

SECT. VIII.

It is this part that has furnished matter of strife, contention, and all uncharitableness, even in, as well as from, the apostolical age. It is this that has added a motive the more, and one that is stronger than any other, to animosity and hatred, to wars and massacres, and to that cruel principle which was never known till Christians introduced it into the world, to persecution for opinions, for opinions often of the most abstract speculation, and of the least importance to civil or religious interests. It is this, in short, whose effects have been so fatal to the peace and happiness of mankind, that nothing which the enemies of religion can say on the subject will be exaggerated beyond the truth. But still the charge they bring will be unjustly brought. These effects have not been caused by the Gospel, but by the system raised upon it. Not by the revelations of God, but by the inventions of men. We distinguished before between the original and the traditional proofs, and we must distinguish here between

between the original and traditional matter of these revelations. The Gospel of Christ is one thing, the Gospel of St. Paul, and of all those who have grafted after him on the same stock, is another.

I will not say, that one article of belief alone is necessary to make men Christians, the belief that Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and foretold by their prophets. This may be the primary, but it is not the sole object of our faith. There are other things doubtless contained in the revelation he made of himself, dependent on, and relative to this article, without the belief of which I suppose, that our christianity would be very defective. But this I say; the articles of belief, which Christ himself enacted by what he said, and by what he did, have been lengthened immeasurably, and we may add both unnecessarily and presumptuously by others since his time. The system of religion, which Christ published, and his evangelists recorded, is a complete system to all the purposes of true religion, natural and revealed. It contains all the duties of the former, it enforces them, by asserting the divine mission of the publisher, who proved his assertions at the same time by his miracles, and it enforces the whole law of faith, by promising rewards, and threatening punishments, which he declares he will distribute when he comes to judge the world. Beside which, if we do not acknowledge the system of belief and practice, which Jesus, the finisher as well as author of our faith, left behind him

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to be, in the extent in which he revealed and left it, complete and perfect, we must be reduced to the grossest absurdity, and to little less than blasphemy.

These reasons, which cut up the root of artificial theology, deserve, for that reason, to be more fully explained. If we do not acknowledge them, we assume, that the Son of God, who was sent by the Father to make a new covenant with mankind, and to establish a spiritual kingdom on the ruins of paganism, and the reformation at least of Judaism, executed his commission imperfectly; we assume, that he died to redeem mankind from sin, and from death, the wages of sin, but that he left them at the same time without sufficient information concerning that faith in him, and that obedience to his law, which could alone make this redemption effectual to all the gracious purposes of it; since we might rise to immortality indeed by the merits of his passion, but this resurrection might be to damnation too, unless an entire faith in him, cooperating with our imperfect obedience, justified and saved us. In short, we assume, that they who were converted to christianity by Christ himself, and who died before the supposed imperfection of his revelation had been supplied by the apostles, by Paul particularly, lived and died without a sufficient knowledge of the terms of salvation, than which nothing can be said more abominable. Natural religion may be collected, slowly, perhaps, though sufficiently, by natural reason, from the works of God, wherein

wherein he manifests his will to mankind. But a religion, revealed by God himself immediately, must have been complete and perfect from the first promulgation in the mind of every convert to it, according to all our ideas of order: and if we consider it as a covenant of grace, the covenant must have been made at once, according to all these ideas, and all those of justice. No new articles of belief, no new duties, could be made necessary to salvation afterward, without changing the covenant: and at that rate how many new covenants might there not be? How often, I say it with horrour, might not God change his mind?

Will it be urged, as an answer to what has been said, that the explanations and additions, which have been made, were made by the same authority that made the original covenant, in order to ascertain the terms, and to secure the effect of it, and that there is therefore no reason to find fault that they were made? But if this should be said, instead of removing one absurdity and profanation, it will only serve to advance another. The force of the objection rests on the very assertion contained in the answer, on the sameness of the authority. If the additions were not said to be made by the same authority, they would be entitled to regard, and the objection would vanish. But since they are said to be so made, and since they make a change in the covenant, for a covenant is changed by additional conditions, though the original remain still in force, the objection is confirm-

ed by the answer; and a farther absurdity arises from it, or the same absurdity appears in a new light. If it was necessary that the apostles, who were filled with the Holy Ghost, or other inspired persons, should publish, by the assistance of the spirit, any knowledge necessary to salvation, which Jesus had not taught, or explain the covenant of grace more perfectly than he had done; it follows, that the third person of the Trinity was employed to assist the second in making a more full and perfect publication of the Gospel, which comes too near the case of poor mortals, who want this assistance to receive and practise the Gospel as they ought, and to whom it is given to supply the imperfection of their nature. Upon the whole, have we not reason to distinguish with a holy fear between the original system of christianity, and the very best, if that could be ascertained, of all those discordant systems into which the pure ore of the Gospel has been so often melted down and cast anew, during seventeen centuries, at different times, and every time with such a mixture of human alloy, that no one of them can carry, without fraud, the image and superscription of our heavenly Cæsar?

Christianity, as it stands in the Gospel, contains not only a complete but a very plain system of religion; it is in truth the system of natural religion, and such it might have continued to the unspeakable advantage of mankind, if it had been propagated with the same simplicity, with which it was originally taught by Christ himself. But this could

could not have happened, unless it had pleased the Divine Providence to preserve the purity of it by constant interpositions, and by extraordinary means sufficient to alter the ordinary course of things. Such a constant interposition, and such extraordinary means, not being employed, christianity was left very soon to shift for itself, in the midst of a frantick world, and in an age when the most licentious reasonings, and the most extravagant superstitions, in opinion and practice, prevailed universally under the respectable names of theology and metaphysics; and when the Jews themselves, on whose religion, and on the authority of whose scriptures christianity was founded, had already gone far in corrupting both, by oral traditions and cabalistical whimsies, by a mixture of notions taken from the Chaldaick philosophy during their captivity, and from the Grecian philosophy since the expedition of Alexander. The traces of these mixtures are discernable. Those of Greek origin most manifestly; and among them, those of Platonism are so strongly marked, that it is impossible to mistake them. This philosophy was the very quintessence of the theology and metaphysicks, which Plato, and Pythagoras before him, had imported into Greece. It had been extracted by the intense heat of the warmest imagination that ever Greece produced, and had contributed more than any other system of paganism to turn theists into enthusiasts, and to confirm that fondness for mystery, without an air of which no doctrine could pass for divine. What

effect all these circumstances had on christianity, and how they served to raise an intricate, voluminous, and contentious science on foundations of the greatest simplicity and plainness, it may be worth while to examine more particularly, and in such a detail as the nature of these Essays, which are not designed to be treatises, and my confined knowledge of antiquity, permit. The extent of one and the other will be sufficient, perhaps, for our purpose.

SECT. IX.

MEN have accustomed themselves to talk so vaguely about mysteries, that the very meaning of the word is become a mystery. The whole New Testament has been called the Gospel, and the whole Gospel a mystery. Both very improperly; for the first confounds what should be always distinguished in favour of the original system of christianity: and the second is absurd in the highest degree, since nothing can be conceived to be more so than to predicate two contradictory terms of the same subject. To affirm that a thing is, and is not existent at the same time, is just as reasonable as to affirm, that the Gospel is at once a revelation and a mystery, a thing shown and a thing hidden. That there are many ambiguous expressions, and many dark sayings, in the Gospel; that there are many doctrines, which reason would never have taught, nor is able to comprehend now they

they are taught; cannot be denied. Nay the utmost human endeavours have been, and must be always, employed in vain to reduce the intire plan of divine wisdom in the mission of Christ, and the redemption of man, to a coherent, intelligible, and reasonable system of doctrines and facts. Is it strange that it should be so? It could not be otherwise. Two of the evangelists recorded, as witnesses, what they saw and heard in this extraordinary conjuncture, and two others what they were told about it. Not the whole indeed; for then the world could not have contained the books that would have been written, but as much as was necessary, and even a little more than was strictly so, to account for the establishment of the spiritual kingdom of Christ, as it is called improperly enough, and to explain the laws of it, and the conditions of admission into it. If a great prince should arise in any country, make an intire revolution in the constitution of it, reform some, and abolish others of the ancient laws and customs, and establish a new government on new principles of government, would it not be sufficient for the people to know his right in general, and the measures of their obedience in particular? Would they complain, if some things essential to neither, and scarce relative to the latter, were obscurely mentioned in any of his declarations or constitutions, that they wanted a complete system of the government to which they submitted themselves, and were therefore obliged to supply on their own authority what they had not received on

the authority of their legislator. I think they would make no such complaint. Reasonable men I am sure would not. To such the whole would appear plain enough, and they would resolve to believe and obey it in the obvious and literal sense, while a few busy, overcurious, and designing politicians might render what was plain, intricate, and two or three dark expressions, the subject of perpetual dispute, and irreconcilable division, by their refinements. Thus the peace of society might be broken, and the very end of government be defeated, not by any want of necessary information, but by an affectation of knowing more than the legislator thought it necessary that they should know. Such as I have represented these politicians in civil government, such have divines and metaphysicians shown themselves in religion: and it is full as unjust to charge the mischiefs that have followed in one case on religion, as it would be to charge those that would follow in the other on government.

The only way to have prevented such mischiefs as these from arising in the city of God would have been this, that Christians should have adhered closely to the Gospel, as it was taught by Christ himself; that they should have thought it, as he thought it, sufficient for them; have received implicitly what is plainly revealed in it, and have avoided all dogmatical decisions on things obscure or doubtful. Explanations in all these cases serve only to multiply disputes, and to establish religion on human, instead of divine authority.

ty. This affords a rule invariable as God himself. The other fluctuates as the opinions, and even the interests of men vary. Under one, Christians might have continued united in the same communion, and even members of the same family, friends and brethren. Under the other it is impossible that this, which is the great object of christianity, should be obtained; and therefore I am willing to believe, that they who had been the immediate disciples of the Saviour preached his Gospel in a spirit of union, in so simple a style, and in so strict and scrupulous a conformity to the revelations he had made, in what form soever the writings of these men have come down to us, through very interpolating hands, that there neither was nor could be any division among them, nor any seeds of division sowed by them. He who compares the Epistles of James, of Peter, and John, such as we have them, with those of Paul, and all these with the doctrines of the Gospel, will be perhaps of this opinion; at least he will have no ground to say of the three first, that they were authors of new gospels, as he will have grounds to say of the last, and as the last does in effect say of himself. He will be of this opinion too the more easily, on account of a very sensible difference in the manner as well as the matter of their writings. There is a most remarkable and amiable anecdote to this purpose mentioned by some writers, and for which the authority of Jerom is cited. St. John had been long confined in the

island of Patmos, to which Domitian had banished him, and where it is pretended that he writ the Apocalypse, that strange rhapsody of unintelligible revelations, as they are called most absurdly. It is much more probable, and more for the honour of the evangelist, as well as of christianity, to believe, that they were composed by Cerinthus, by a visionary of the same name as that of the apostle, or by some other enthusiast. They were not admitted into the canon at Laodicea, nor would have been ever admitted to disgrace it, if Justin, Irenæus, Origen, and Tertullian, in whom the love of mystery was a kind of delirium, and after their example several of the other fathers, had not crowded them into the canon by receiving them as canonical. The anecdote I am about to produce will show how far St. John was, though his Gospel gave him the title of the theologian, from multiplying and propagating mysteries, and how he retained that character of plainness and simplicity, which he had acquired in the school of his divine master. Domitian dead, and Nerva emperour, the holy evangelist returned to his church at Ephesus, threescore years after the death of Jesus. Not only the Gospels, his own among the rest, which it is said that he writ at the desire of his people as soon as he returned to them; but even the Epistles were then writ, and the system of christianity had taken, in most of the churches at least, the form which Paul had given it. If the good old man, feeble and decrepit, was unable to make

long

long sermons, it appeared that he did not think them very necessary neither; for when he spoke in the publick assemblies, the sum of what he said was, children love one another. The people of Ephesus, where Paul had been, where he boasted that he had fought with beasts after the manner of men, where he had certainly made long and mystical discourses, were disappointed and dissatisfied with the succinct and plain doctrine of their bishop; but when they expostulated with him upon it, they had a very short and decisive answer, this the Lord commands: and if you do this, it is sufficient. He spoke to men who believed already in Jesus the Messiah, and in all that he had just before recorded in the Gospel he published at their request, after his return from Patmos. Whatever others might think, he thought that the Gospel wanted no further explanations, nor extensions, and contented himself therefore to recal to their memory, on every occasion, that fundamental article of the law of nature, and the law of the Gospel, universal benevolence.

The character of St. John was not that of St. Paul. One had been formed in the bosom of Jesus; called to be a disciple, and commissioned to be an apostle, instructed by the doctrine and example of his master. He had, like Peter and the rest, no other science, and what that was the four evangelists tell us. Paul, on the contrary, had been educated in the schools of the law, such as the law was become in those days, when oral tradition,

tradition, cabalistical mysteries, and scraps of Pythagorician, Platonick, and even Stoician doctrines, had been blended with it, and composed the most extravagant systems of philosophy and religion. The masters of all this learning were the Pharisees, whose sect began probably two hundred years before Christ, and was in the highest reputation when he came into the world. Of this sect was Paul; and he continued in it till he was about forty years old, profitting in the religion of the Jews above many of his equals—— exceedingly zealous of the traditions of his fathers ——and persecuting the church of God*. After this, he, who had resisted so many miracles, was converted by a miracle, which he and his amanuensis Luke have related. He was called by God himself in a great light, which was always understood to denote some divine presence, to be an apostle, a chosen vessel, replenished with gifts of the Holy Ghost, and overflowing with grace. His peculiar destination was to preach Christ, whom God had revealed in him, among the heathen: and this he began to do immediately, for being made an apostle by a distinct commission from the rest, he conferred not with flesh and blood, nor went up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before him, but preached as soon as his eyes were opened, as he had received the imposition of hands, and as he had been baptised, by virtue of a particular inspiration, that Gospel,

* Epist. to the Gal. chap. 1.

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of which he speaks to the Galatians with so much confidence, that he pronounces every one who should preach any thing different from it, himself, an angel from Heaven, and therefore most certainly even the other apostles, accursed. It was not till three years after his journey into Arabia, and his return to Damascus, that he went to Jerusalem, where he communicated privately to them, which were of reputation, the Gospel he preached to the Gentiles; for he might want their approbation, though he did not want their information nor advice: and this he obtained so far, that they gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that these two should preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, and they, that is, the other apostles, to the children of Israel.

This short deduction of facts, taken from St. Paul's own account of himself, and in which he assured the Galatians before God that he lied not, may serve to introduce an observation touched upon already, and more easily made than explained. In the last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, he calls the Gospel he preached, my Gospel: which expression he cannot be supposed to have used, says Mr. Locke in his note on the passage, very justly, unless he knew that what he preached had something in it, that distinguished it from what was preached by others. But what that was we are left by this able commentator to seek. It was not plainly, what he says it was plainly, the mystery of God's purpose of taking in the Gentiles to be his people——and without sub-

subjecting them to circumcision, or the law of Moses. If this mystery, so inconsistent with the declarations and practice of Jesus, was revealed to Paul, it was revealed to the apostles too, since they preached and published the glad tidings of salvation indifferently to the Jews and Gentiles; in doing which, had this mystery been revealed to him, exclusively of them, they would have been apostles of Paul, in this instance, rather than of Christ. If the exemption of the gentile converts from circumcision, and other observances of the Mosaical law, was the mystery, the mystery was explained by the decree of the Council of Jerusalem; by which nothing more was required of the Gentiles, than to abstain from idolatry, or meats offered to idols, from fornication, and from blood. St. Paul assumed, indeed, that not only the vocation of the Gentiles, but this exemption in favour of them, and of the Jews too, were mysteries revealed particularly to him. It is evident, however, that the other apostles, and the elders, looked on it as no mystery at all, and that they treated it as a matter of discipline: so that a question may arise, whether St. Paul was, what the Pope pretends to be, above the council, or the council above him. The apostles had given no directions to insist, that the Gentiles should, or should not, submit to circumcision, and to the yokes of the law, which St. Peter scruples not to say, in his speech on that occasion, were so heavy, that "neither they

"they nor their fathers were able to bear them*." In a word, by the opinion St. James delivered, and by the whole tenour of the decree, it is manifest, that the mistaken zeal for the law, which some of the Jews retained after their conversion, and perhaps the immoderate zeal of St. Paul for an immediate and total abolition of it, had given rise to this dispute; and that it was determined not as a point on which the divine purpose had been revealed to Paul, or any one else, but according to what has been just now said, as a point of discipline, left to the discretion of the apostles and elders, whose sole regard was to prevent any schism in a church hardly yet formed, and who, for that reason, while they indulged the Jews in circumcision, and other ritual observances of their law, exempted the Gentiles from the far greatest and heaviest part of them.

But there is something more to be observed. If the purpose of God was to take the Gentiles to be his people, under the Messiah, in this manner, if their abstaining from Jewish rites and ceremonies was a positive law of God, under the new covenant, as the abstaining from idolatry was both under the new and under the old, how came it to pass, that the Messiah himself gave no instruction about it to his apostles, when he sent them to preach his Gospel to all nations, and, as we may say, to people his kingdom, which they did chiefly out of the Gentile world? Why was the

* Acts, chap. xv.

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revelation of this important mystery, so necessary to be published at the very first publication of the Gospel, if it was the eternal purpose of God, or else not necessary at all, reserved for St. Paul, who was then a persecutor, not a preacher of the Gospel, and whose apostleship did not begin before the conversions? Shall we say, that this eternal purpose of the Father was unknown to the Son? We shall blaspheme if we do. Shall we say, that it was known to him, but that he neglected to communicate it to the first preachers of his Gospel, and gave them imperfect instructions? The profanation will be little less. These questions, and some others of the same kind, will not be easily answered, unless it be by men who are never at a loss to account for the absurdities that they impute to the divine conduct, by supposing it directed according to such partialities, as are proportioned to the lowness of their minds: but the pertness, not to say the impudence, of these men, deserving no regard, we must seek another solution of the difficulty, and endeavour to find what it was that distinguished St. Paul, in this respect, from the other apostles, and gave him a reason for calling the Gospel he preached his own Gospel.

Some solution of this sort may occur to us, perhaps, if we reflect on what was mentioned above, concerning the difference between the manner in which St. Paul preached the Gospel, and that of the other apostles, which difference marks very strongly the different schools wherein they had

had been instructed, and had formed the habits that characterised them; the school of Christ, and the school of Gamaliel. From one of these the apostles had brought great modesty, and gentleness of temper, a short, familiar, and simple style, like that of their Lord and master. From the other St. Paul carried into the apostleship, with a great stock of Jewish learning, a great deal of that assuming air, which is apt to accompany much learning, or the opinion of it: and accordingly we find him obliged, more than once, in his Epistles, to excuse his boasting, and the value he set on himself, by such humble expressions as a man who had not been full of the Holy Ghost might, in his case, have taken a pride in using. He carried with him likewise, from the Pharisaical schools, a great profusion of words, and of involved unconnected discourse, even on those subjects which required to be the most clearly and distinctly developed, if they were to be insisted upon at all, and not to be passed over in silence rather, or touched very transiently, as they had been by the other apostles. The other apostles were all evangelists, that is, they were publishers of the glad tidings of salvation: they declared to the world, that the kingdom of the Messiah, that is, the spiritual kingdom, was begun, and they taught men the indispensable conditions of belief and practice, in order to be admitted into it. Farther than was necessary to this purpose they did not affect to carry their doctrines. They meaned to convince, not to perplex the minds of men.

men. They knew that by doing the last, they should obstruct the first; or should give great advantage to the false doctors that were arisen, and were to arise to corrupt christianity. St. Paul was a loose paraphraser, a cabalistical commentator, as much, at least, as any ancient or modern rabbin; and though his Gospel was, in the fundamental principles of it, the same as theirs, yet he mingled it up with so much of his own theology, that he might not, improperly, and in our sense, call it his own, and that we may call him the father of artificial theology. Not content to reveal mysterious truths in propositions, whose terms were intelligible, though the manner of being of these truths was still a mystery, which is no objection to the belief of any thing contained in a revelation, once proved to be divine, he amplified them, descanted upon them, opened the whole œconomy of divine wisdom from Adam to Christ, and accounted for the several dispensations of God to man. The original Gospel, such as the other apostles preached it, was a plain system of belief and practice, fitted for all times, and proportioned to all understandings. St. Paul's Gospel, if it may be said to be fitted as much as the others for all times, of which I doubt, cannot be said to be proportioned to all understandings. It is evidently not so to the understandings of the deepest divines, and the most subtile metaphysicians; since they have been wrangling about it from that time to this, and have established the most opposite doctrines on the same texts, to the breach

breach of all charity, and the disturbance of the christian world*.

It may be said, that some passages in the four

* I will mention a little more fully, in this note, what I omitted in the text. All that is said there is said relatively to received interpretations and opinions, such as Mr. Locke would have admitted, and were therefore proper to be followed in reasoning against him. But if I am to speak my own opinion; the matter in question may be decided more shortly, and on the whole more consistently. St. Paul then might very well talk of his Gospel, even in contradistinction to that of Christ, and others, as I have said, that were directly repugnant both to the word and example of the Messiah. Christ professed Judaism, and declared himself sent to the Jews alone, and not even to the Samaritans, so positively, that when he commissioned his apostles, he may be, and, to make him consistent, ought to be understood to have meaned no more, than to send them to the Jews dispersed in all nations. St. Paul, on the contrary, instead of grafting Christianity on Judaism, insisted on an entire abolition of the latter: to which, however, he had conformed most hypocritically on more occasions than one; and his doctrine became, not at once, but in time, the doctrine of the christian church. This may appear strange to those who read, without a free consideration of what they read: and it will appear still more strange to them to find a pagan emperour, and a great enemy both of Jews and Christians, introduced as an instrument appointed by God to accomplish his secret designs in confirming the doctrine of St. Paul's Gospel; and yet Hadrian is so introduced by Sulpicius Severus; for he says, that the christian church at Jerusalem having had till that time none but Jews in the episcopal chair, and the greatest part of the faithful there believing in Jesus Christ without departing from the legal ceremonies, that edict of Hadrian, which hindered Jews from going to Jerusalem, was of great use to christianity; by which we must understand the christianity of St. Paul's Gospel, and not that of Christ's.

Gospels, and even some expressions of Christ recorded in them, have been liable to various interpretations, and have produced such disputes and contests as these which I ascribe to the writings of St. Paul. But although this be undoubtedly true, the difference between the original Gospel, and that of St. Paul, is very real, and very manifest. One is a plain and clear system of religion, with here and there a doubtful phrase, that casts no obscurity on the rest. The other is an intricate and dark system, with here and there an intelligible phrase, that casts no light on the rest, but is rather lost in the gloom of the whole. By faith I may believe, but by faith I cannot understand. A proposition, the terms of which are unintelligible, is an absolute mystery: to say that we are bound to believe mysteries, in this sense, is itself nonsense: to say we do believe them is a lie. But a proposition, the terms of which are intelligible, may be an object of faith, though we understand by it nothing more than the terms; when it is supported, as was said above, by divine authority, nay, often when it is supported only by human. A man, upon whose knowledge and sincerity I ought to depend, reveals to me a few mathematical truths, which, in certain circumstances, it is necessary I should know, and troubles me neither with the demonstrations, which I might not be able to comprehend, nor with many corollaries to be drawn from them, which I do not want. Another, the scholar of the first, and of less authority than his master, brings me a paper filled

filled with diagrams, and letters, and figures, which, he assures me, contains demonstrations of the former truths, and explanations of several corollaries deducible from them. I understand neither. Those whom I consult appear to understand them as little as myself, by their disputes about the meaning of them. The truths which were clear and sufficient for me, in simple propositions, as I received them first, are involved in mystery; and then incoherent figurative discourse thickens the cloud.

Let any man read the Epistles we have of this apostle's writing, after he has read the Gospels; let him read the former, as he would read any other books of philosophy or theology; let him call in Mr. Locke to his assistance, who has succeeded better, perhaps, than any other expositor, by happier conjectures, and no greater licence of paraphrase, in giving an air of coherence, consistency, and rationality to these Epistles, and in making them intelligible: such a man will not be able, after all his pains, to show any one mystery that is left unfolded in the concise language of the Gospel, taught by Christ and his apostles, that has been rendered less mysterious by the prolixity of St. Paul. St. Paul rather doubles mystery than simplifies it, if I may say so, and adds every where a mystery of words to a mystery of things. That they who have, since his time, and after his example, grafted theology on revelation, extended the doctrines of it, explained and applied the prophecies, types, and figures, invented new

ones of every sort, and raised a variety of discord and systems on the same simple and uniform plan, should be, for the most part, very little intelligible, is not wonderful. He, who has clear and distinct ideas in his mind, will write clearly and distinctly: and the author who puzzles an attentive reader is first puzzled himself, how common soever it be, in the science we speak of here particularly, to see those admired the most who are the least understood. That has been the case of these men. They have pretended to instruct others on subjects, on which it was impossible they should have clear and distinct ideas, or, indeed, any ideas at all. But that St. Paul should write confusedly and unintelligibly, he, who was illuminated by the Holy Ghost, that he might enlighten the Gentiles, and he who received all he taught by immediate revelation, must be always a problem not easy to resolve. "He was," it is said, "a man of quick thought and warm temper— "versed in the writings of the Old Testament, "full of the doctrines of the New——so that one "may consider him, when he was writing, as beset "with a crowd of thoughts, all striving for utter- "ance*." But are we not to consider him too, when he was writing, as a man under the influence of actual inspiration? And was not divine inspiration sufficient to keep him from falling into those faults, want of order and perspicuity, into which none but the meanest of uninspired writers

* Locke's Preface to his Paraphrase, &c.

are

are apt to fall? Mr. Locke should have thought so, since St. Paul says, that the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets*: and he, in his paraphrase, that Christians, however filled with the Holy Ghost——are not hurried away by any compulsion. A neglect of eloquence, and the ornaments of speech, became an apostle. But it is hard to discern how a neglect of order and perspicuity should be apostolical, since the design of such a mission is to instruct and to convince.'

SECT. X.

After saying so much of the unintelligibility of Paul's Gospel, truth authorises me to add, that where it is intelligible it is often absurd, or profane, or trifling. Is not the doctrine of passive obedience, which he teaches, most intelligibly absurd? Is not that of absolute predestination most intelligibly profane? Is not one of them repugnant to common sense? Is not the other as repugnant to all the ideas of God's moral perfections? Would not either of them be sufficient to shake the credit even of Christ's Gospel, if they were contained in it?

But it remains, that I give an instance of the most intelligible trifling that we find in this Gospel, and this instance will lead us to observe in what manner christianity was taught and propagated by

* 1 Cor. c. xiv.

congregation were to judge; which not only begat debate, but caused interruptions, that usually begat altercation. That this must have happened we may assure ourselves, since by one of the rules St. Paul prescribes, if any thing was revealed to a sitter-by, the speaker was to hold his peace. Simon, the magician, would have bought the power of bestowing the gifts of the Holy Ghost by the imposition of his hands, as he saw them bestowed by Peter and John; and Simon had embraced christianity, and had been baptised. In an age, therefore, when a communication of these gifts was esteemed so common and so easily given, it could not but be, that multitudes thought they had some or more of these gifts, and especially that of prophesying, and that, as some imagined, piously, they had inspirations when they had them not; so others, even this magician, though the apostles had rejected his offer, affected impiously to have them. It could not be hard to pass false revelations on a world, on whom it was so easy to pass false miracles; which this very Simon, and other supposed magicians, and real impostors, did very frequently.

This opinion of divine illuminations and revelations being once established, an abstruse theology being once grafted on the plain doctrines which the Gospel taught, and an example being set of extending the system beyond it's native simplicity, by collecting passages here and there, and by comparing and applying them in a cabalistical manner, even according to the sound, very often,

rather

rather than the import of the words, the natural consequences did not fail to follow among the illiterate and superstitious Jews and Gentiles, who were the first converts to christianity. I need not stay to point out these consequences. History, ancient and modern, does that sufficiently, and even our own experience, in some degree. Every man, who has heard of the language and behaviour of men possessed with fanaticism, may point them out to himself. But enthusiasm, superstition, and the abuse of religion, were not confined to the most illiterate. A multitude of new doctors arose, all of whom pretended to have divine knowledge, and some to be divine persons. A multitude of doctors formed a multitude of sects: the followers of Simon the magician, as he was thought by those who were no conjurers themselves, the disciples of Carpocras and of Cerinthus, of Cerdon, Marcion, and soon after these of Manes, the Nicholaites, the Valentinians, and many others; for they grew up apace.

These men had the Old Testament, and several Gospels, and several apostolical Epistles before them, for no canon of Scripture was yet settled, nor till more than three centuries afterward; though it may seem not a little extraordinary, that this should have been neglected, while the tradition, that could alone establish the authenticity of these writings, was fresh enough to be itself authentick. The writings, however, that passed all for authentick, in some or other of the christian churches, these men had. Nay, some of them

them had been hearers of the apostles, and had begun to dogmatise at the same time. Neither they nor their successors had the same spirit. But they assumed the same liberty, and by adding allegory to allegory, type to type, mystery to mystery, and one arbitrary interpretation to another, christianity became a confused chaos of theology. Such it continued long, and such it is, in some degree, even now; for though many of the systems that were formed out of it, and that were coeval with it, wore out in the space of three or four centuries, many others sprung up from the same seeds, and were nursed into maturity and strength by the same culture. Nay, some of the same seeds produce, now and then, even at this day, and in our own country, a feeble weed or two in the vineyard of the Lord. Some of the churches, which were established by the apostles, or their immediate successors, and which maintained a charitable correspondence together, might maintain likewise, for ought we know, with greater purity of manners, a greater purity of doctrine. But we must not believe, on the first head, that they who dissented from them, and were therefore called hereticks by them, fell into such abominations as have been represented by Irenæus, Tertullian, Epiphanius, and other fathers, who were very cholerick, very foul-mouthed, and often guilty of scandalous exaggeration. A charge that may be brought with the more confidence, since it is supported by their own writings that are extant, and by men of the greatest

greatest authority in ecclesiastical literature; and since it can be neither denied, evaded, nor excused, by those who are the least willing to own it. As we must not believe all that the fathers advance on this head, so must not we believe on the other, as many good people seem to do, that the primitive Christians had a uniform plan of theology, explained as we explain it, and understood as we understand it. The system swelled insensibly faster among some, more slowly among others: and they seemed to agree much better than they did in reality, as it appeared when criticism came in fashion, and they were obliged to express themselves with more precision concerning the principal articles of their faith.

SECT. XI.

All these sects may be comprehended under the general name of Gnosticks, or learned and illuminated. At first they affected to have it thought, that they alone were both one and the other, and to despise such as could not discover all they pretended to discover of the hidden sense of the Scriptures, and of the mysteries of Christianity. But the orthodox grew, in time, as much Gnosticks as others: and we see, that Clement of Alexandria * thought it necessary to be so, in order to be truly religious. Illumination, and the gifts of the Spirit, served to establish this

* Strom. Lib. 7.

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christianity; but philosophy and the sciences were of use to confirm and improve it. No ages or countries could be more prepared to adopt every theological and metaphysical notion, even the most extravagant and least intelligible, than those wherein the christian religion was first published and propagated. Egypt, and the eastern kingdoms, had been famous schools of a reputed divine philosophy. Pythagoras had gone to them all. Plato had gone to the former only. But what he had not acquired at the first hand, from the Gymnosophists, the followers of Zoroaster, the magi, and other oriental masters, he acquired at the second, by conversing with the Italick philosophers, and by a study of their writings. He says somewhere, that the Greeks improved and mended all they borrowed from the barbarians, which I am far from believing to be true. But if Pythagoras and he carried any science farther than their masters, I incline to think it was the most fantastick.

Since the works of Plato are in our hands, we may speak of him and his theology with more assurance, than of those who went before him, or of their doctrines. Those of Orpheus, or those that passed under such a name in ancient Greece, were chiefly mythological; those of Pythagoras, symbolical; and those of Plato metaphysical, with a mixture of the other two. Nothing could be more proper, nor effectual, to promote fantastical knowledge, than a method of philosophising by fables, symbols, and almost a perpetual allegory.

But

But the founder of the academy did more. He poisoned the very source of all real knowledge, by inducing men to believe, that their minds are capable of abstracting, as no human mind can abstract, and of acquiring ideas, that it is impossible any human mind should perceive. He pretended to raise a mystick ladder, on which we might not only clamber up by dint of meditation to a region of pure intellect, wherein alone is knowledge, and leave sensible objects behind us, concerning which nothing better than opinion is to be had, but find at the head of it incorporeal essences, immaterial forms, spiritual beings, and perhaps the Logos or second God, as the supreme God is supposed to have been at the head of the ladder Jacob saw in his dream. Angels went up and down one: philosophers were to go up and down the other.

This philosopher dealed little in physicks: and he was in the right to neglect them. Metaphysicks served his purpose better. Hypotheses of the former kind must be founded in some real knowledge, how high soever the top of the ladder reaches, the foot must stand firm on the earth. But hypotheses of the other kind are more easy to be framed, and less easy to be controlled. Thus, for instance, an intellectual world being once assumed, wherein the ideas, the forms, the patterns of all that exist in the sensible world reside, it was easy to people it with numberless intellectual, that is, spiritual, that is, immaterial, that is, simple beings, without extension or solidity;

dity, that is, beings of which these refiners had negative, but no positive ideas. They were at liberty afterward to suppose whatever relations they pleased between these beings, and between them and men. Metaphysical hypotheses, in short, are not content to account for what may be by what is, nor to improve science according to the conditions of our nature, by raising probability on the foundations of certainty; but the makers of them affect to range in the immense void of possibility, with little or no regard to actuality, and begin very often, as well as end, in supposition. Not only their systems are hypothetical, but the first principles of them, and the very ideas and notions which compose them, are hypothetical too.

Such a philosopher, such a teacher of imaginary and fantastical knowledge, Plato was. Notwithstanding which, or for which reason rather, he grew soon into great vogue in Greece, and in those countries where Grecian literature was propagated after the expedition of Alexander. This philosophy could not fail to be well received in those countries, from the schools of which it had been derived originally; and it flourished accordingly, and triumphed, as it were, over all others in some parts of Asia, and in Egypt, while it made it's way into Italy and was propagated westward through the Roman Empire. The Jews of Palestine, and they who lived under the protection of the Ptolemies, had taken a strong tincture of heathen philosophy, and of this in particular.

The

The doctrines of the immortality of the soul, of a future state of rewards and punishments, and even that of a metempsychosis, were adopted by the learned among them; though they were rejected by those who adhered to the letter of the law, for Moses had taught nothing of this kind. If any such hints are contained in the other books of their Scriptures, it is impossible to say when or by whom those books were written, with the least assurance, notwithstanding all the dogmatical impertinence of scholars: whereas we know, that all their sacred writings were compiled after their captivity, and that the canon of them was long in settling. It is possible, therefore, and even evident, that if they knew any thing of these doctrines, which had not been transmitted to them by Moses, before their acquaintance with the Greek philosophy, they must have learned it from the nations among whom they had been mixed, and from whom the Greeks had learned the same, from the Chaldæans, and even from the Egyptians, with whom they had commerce, and in whose country many of them found a refuge in the desolation of their own by the Babylonians. But if they had so learned it, they had learned it very darkly; for there is no instance that shows they understood, received, or taught these doctrines, till long after their first acquaintance with the Greeks.

But be all this as it will, it is certain, that Platonism was an established philosophy among the Jews before the coming of Christ, and that it

it was much more so among the Christians afterward. It is astonishing to consider how fond the Christians were, in the first ages of this church, to believe, and to make others believe, that all the mysteries of their religion had been revealed by the writings of Pagan philosophers, many centuries before they were so by the preaching of Christ and his apostles: as if the latter could want, or the former give any additional authority. It was to promote this opinion, that so many books were forged under the names of Mercurius Trismegistus, of Hystaspes, of the Sybils, and perhaps of others. These forgeries, indeed, were so gross, that they might be well suspected even at the time they were published. Their credit, however, was maintained, till they had had in some degree the effect they were designed to have. When they could have this effect in any degree no longer, they were rejected, and even condemned. There was the less need of them for the absurd purposes to which they were applied, because the writings of Plato*, writings indisputably his, were publick; and because his works alone, wherein was mingled much of the Pythagorean and other ancient theology, formed an ample and sufficient repertory of theological fables and symbols, and of metaphysical mysteries. They who have employed themselves from

* "Res enim et verba scholam Platonis sapiunt, iis excep-
" tis, quæ miscet è libris divinis." Casaub. speaking of one of these books, in his Exercit.

those

those days to ours in raising systems of divinity on the Gospel, and imposing their own inventions by pretending the authority of it, have contented themselves accordingly with the assistance of Plato and Aristotle; of the master, for sublimity of matter; of the scholar, for subtilty of form.

If the absurdity of those, who have gone about to explain, to confirm, and even to improve christianity by the doctrines and authority of paganism, be, as it is surely, very astonishing; we must confess, that it is still more astonishing to observe the strange conformity between Platonism and genuine christianity itself, such as it is taught in the original Gospel. We need not stand to compare them here. Particular instances of conformity will occur often enough. In general, the Platonick and christian systems have a very near resemblance, "qualis decet esse sororum:" and several of the fathers, as well as modern divines, have endeavoured with all their might, by forced constructions, and sometimes by no very faithful extracts, to make this resemblance appear still greater. Ridiculous endeavours, no doubt, since they give unbelievers occasion to say, that if the doctrines are the same, they must have been deduced from the same principle, and to ask what that principle was, whether reason or revelation? If we say it was reason; they will reply, that reason could not discover what reason cannot comprehend when it is discovered. A mystery may be an object of faith to him, to whom it is communicated in an intelligible proposition. But it

must be an object of knowledge in him who communicates it, and requires an assent to it, on his own authority, that is, on a confidence that he knows it to be true, and that it is no mystery to him. If we say it was revelation; they will reply, that Plato then must have been illuminated by the Holy Ghost; that he must have been the precursor of the Saviour, as some Platonick bigots have ventured, with a very little softening to the term, to call him; and that he must have been a precursor too of more importance than St. John. St. John instituted a baptism of repentance; and much has been said by ancient and modern doctors in theology to state the difference between this baptism and that of Christ, baptism with water*, and baptism with the Holy Ghost and with fire†. These terms, as dark as they are, show however a manifest difference; and there can be no doubt, that the baptism of Jesus was much more effectual than the baptism of John, as that of John was effectual to higher purposes than that of the Jews. But Plato, instead of calling on men in general to repent, and of instituting one mystical ceremony, anticipated the Gospel on so many principal articles of belief and practice, that as some divines say the Gospel was a republication of the law of nature, the unbelievers will say it was a republication of the theology of Plato. They will argue "a fortiori," that since the

* In aquâ in pœnitentiam.

† In spiritu sancto, et igni. Mat. cap. iii.

repub-

republication of these mysteries was made by divine revelation, the publication of them must have been of necessity made by the same means, and they will conclude, perhaps, by asking with a sneer, whether a man, whose passion for courtesans and handsome boys inspired him to write so many lewd verses, was likely to be inspired by the Holy Ghost?

Such considerations as these are more than sufficient to explode the impertinent and profane notion, that Plato was inspired immediately, or that he had, in any lower degree metaphysicians can imagine, such a share of divine illumination as enabled him to discover, in part at least, those mysterious truths that were not to be fully revealed till the Messiah came. But the question returns, how came he to discover them, even in part, near four centuries before the Messiah did come? or how came they to make a part of that pagan theology from which he took them? A plain answer may be made to these questions: and I think there is no other that can be reconciled to common sense. I have hinted at it already: but it requires to be more explained. All we can know of the divine nature, of the attributes, providence, and the will of God, must be comunicated to us by his word, or collected by us from his works. The heathen philosophers had not his word, and they corrupted all the knowledge they acquired from his works by their manner of philosophising. They not only hastened too rashly from particular to general know-

ledge, and from a few imperfect observations of the phænomena, to the most extensive hypotheses, but they raised hypotheses independently of the observations they made, or might have made, and then reasoned on these hypotheses as from certain principles of knowledge: so that the little real knowledge they acquired "à posteriori" was controlled by that which they fancied that they acquired "a priori," and thus the whole mass of the first philosophy was corrupted. They discovered, in his works, a first intelligent Cause of all things, a Being of infinite power and wisdom, whose providence is over all his creatures, and whose will, relatively to man, is manifested in the whole human system. Here was abundant matter of real knowledge. Thus far the supreme Being lets himself down, if I may use such an expression, within the verge of human comprehension, and of human alone, as far as we can judge of the animal world about us. Beyond this fixed point we can have no real knowledge. All, that we may imagine we have, is and must be fantastical. We are no more able to acquire knowledge beyond, than other animals up to this point: and the divine nature, the manner of being, the moral attributes of God, the general system of his providence, are as inscrutable to man as to them. His will too, according to which they are determined by natural instinct, is as inscrutable to us, as to them, beyond the bounds of natural revelation, unless a supernatural revelation

lation communicate farther knowledge, which it did not to these philosophers.

What now was their proceeding? Did they stop where the means of knowledge stop? Not at all. Where the system ended, the hypothesis began; and with this difference between these and all other hypotheses, that those which are made in physicks are made on subjects on which we have much knowledge, and means in our power of acquiring more; whereas hypotheses in theology are made on a subject we know little of, and have not the means of knowing more. Errour in the former may be corrected by improvement of knowledge: errour in the latter cannot, because there can be no improvement beyond the point where such hypotheses begin. It has been observed in these Essays, and more than once, perhaps, that there are philosophers, who boast much of the power which the human mind has of ranging far and wide in the regions of possibility, and of perceiving what may be, as well as what is, from whence they draw very foolish conclusions in favour of human understanding. Now that the mind of man has such a power, we know most consciously. But we know, or may know too as consciously, that the exercise of this power is dangerous, and that he who does not use it under a strict control of judgment on imagination, will be sure to render his conduct and his science both fantastical. Plato, like all the divines of paganism, was far from preserving such a control. No man had more imagination; no man controlled it less.

It would be easy to conceive, if we had not his works before us, that such extravagant methods of philosophising must have produced the most extravagant opinions: and he who reads these works, like a man in his senses, will be tempted to think, on many occasions, that the author was not so. I say on many occasions; for on some it is certain, that he writes like a very pious and rational theist and moralist. But on the whole, his writings are pieces of patch-work, and there are few of them that do not abound in false sublime and low images, in things above comprehension, in things below notice; in the brightest truths, and the foulest errours: and, to come to the present purpose, some of them abound in notions that are agreeable to the christian system, and in others that are repugnant to it, or that bearing an appearance of likeness, nay of sameness, are much more proper to promote superstition and enthusiasm, as in fact they did, than true religion. These considerations, every one of which may be justified by the most famous of his dialogues, gave occasion, perhaps, to some difference that arose in the reception of Platonism by the christian fathers. St. Chrysostom, it is said, declaimed against it: and I remember a passage in Tertullian*, wherein he complains, that the seeds of heresies were scattered in Plato's books of the republick, and in his doctrine of ideas, which he calls "hæretica idea-

* De Anima.

"rum

"rum sacramenta*." The greatest fathers of the church, however, though they pilfered in other things, agreed in admiring Plato, and borrowed much of their theology from him. Such were Justin, Origen, Jerom, Austin, to quote no others, and the first the most remarkably. But how venerable soever their names may be, their conduct was in this respect extremely absurd, injurious to the Gospel, and derogatory to the authority of it; as will appear undeniably by the reflections I had in view, when I said, that a plain answer might be made to those who should ask how the mysterious truths of the Gospel could be known, without divine illumination, to Plato.

SECT. XII.

The reflections, I meaned, are these. What the Christians borrowed from Plato's works was not contained in the Gospel, or it was contained in it. If no such thing was contained in it, the presumption of those was inexcusable, who added a single doctrine to the christian system, or even an explanation of a doctrine, on the faith of a heathen philosopher, whose theism, though purer than that of others, had still a tang of superstition, and even of polytheism. With respect to God, this presumption was a profanation: with respect to man, it was a fraud. The Christians

* ——In ideis Platonicis Gnosticorum hæretica semina relucere,

who were guilty of it imposed on themselves, or, if not on themselves, on others, as far as their authority extended, the word of Plato for the word of God. If the things they borrowed were contained in the Gospel, they had no reason whatever for borrowing; or this must have been their reason, they must have thought the authority of Plato necessary to confirm that of Christ, or reason necessary to render complete what revelation taught imperfectly. The first is a blasphemous, and the second a silly thought. Reason is necessary and sufficient to establish revelation, as it has been showed above. But when the truth of a revelation is established, we are to believe implicitly; the use of reason ceases, her interposition grows impertinent, and nothing can be more so than the affectation of ancient and modern divines, to banish her out of her province, or to appeal to her very weakly in it; while they introduce her into another, and would be thought to rest upon her, where she has nothing to do. Whenever they do this, they go out of their strength: and reason, improperly used, becomes a much better weapon of offence in the hands of their enemies, than of defence in theirs; as the writings of many eminent divines may demonstrate.

If reason now be so ill employed about mysteries that are proposed, she is still less fit and less likely to propose them. Montague would say, they are not her game. The object of reason is truth, intelligible, attainable truth: and if she goes

goes at any time in pursuit of it into that well where it lies concealed, as Empedocles, Democritus, and the rest of the ancient philosophers complained so loudly, she never plunges so far into the dark as to be unable to distinguish it from errour. Divine mysteries she receives implicitly, but she advances none of her own under that title: and a reasonable man, and a mystick man, seem two distinct species. All mysteries, that are not communicated expressly by revelation, are produced by metaphysical delirium and religious enthusiasm; to both of which men of the brightest genius have been often transported. Seneca declares a man, who does not rise above humanity, contemptible*. Many have thought they did so, and, sober on all other subjects, have been stark mad on these; for their is a madness "quoad "hoc," if I may say so: and neither you nor I could be at a loss to cite several, and some living examples of it. But there is too a degree of affectation sometimes in this apparent madness, employed for different purposes. The metaphysical delirium may be kept up by a reputation, which singularity alone is often sufficient to acquire, and much more by an opinion of making new discoveries in the intellectual world. This affectation, sustained by his own warm imagination, and by those of his Egyptian and Pythagorean masters, possessed Plato very strongly, and

* O quam contempta res est homo, nisi supra humana se erexerit!

answered

answered very effectually his purpose in the acquisition of fame. He knew the people with whom he had to do; he knew that no mythology was too gross, no pretended abstractions too whimsical for them: and nothing can show so much either how he had turned their heads, or how easily heads were turned by the marvellous in those days, as the general opinion that prevailed of his divine birth. Apollo appeared to Aristo his father, and forbid him to enjoy his wife during the space of ten months; which was a very unnecessary precaution, if the poor man had often tried and never could; and if Perictione was a virgin, when the same God appeared to her in a vision, and she conceived. Thus Plato was begot to be a physician of souls, as Æsculapius had been a physician of bodies.

Plato might safely give a loose to all the extravagance of his imagination in such an age, and be assured, that the wildest hypotheses would pass for systems of sublime knowledge, and that the doctrines the least understood would be the most admired. He improved this advantage to the utmost, and it happened, as it might without inspiration or miracle, that in his rambling speculations about the divine and spiritual nature, about the immortality of the soul, about God's dispensations in this life and another, and various matters relative to these, he blundered on some divine truths, that were not quite beyond human apprehension, according to human ideas: though they had not been revealed to mankind, nor stripped

stripped of types and figures, those sacred hieroglyphicks, wherein they lay involved. This answer to the question above-mentioned is plain and full; for if events, that were to come to pass in the order of providence, were foretold sometimes by men who neither knew any thing of this order; nor even that they prophesied when they did prophesy, as divines have sometimes said, why should not some truths, that were to be manifested in after ages by divine revelation, be anticipated by human imagination? Human reason would have never discovered them, because they are no more objects of intuitive, nor of demonstrative, than they are of sensitive knowledge; but imagination, conceiving them possible, might impose them for true on minds wherein she exercised the plenitude of her power. Christians, therefore, might have given this answer, and have evaded by it the absurdity of supposing Plato inspired, and the difficulty of accounting for the christianity of his doctrines without this supposition.

SECT. XIII.

I HAVE insisted, and must insist again a little largely, on the theology of Plato; though I have said a great deal in a former Essay concerning his philosophy in general, in order to show the more fully and clearly on what original authority we rest in matters of religion, and because

cause his works have been made, after the writings of St. Paul, a principal foundation of all that theology, which has occasioned so many disputes in the world, and has rendered the christian religion obnoxious to the cavils of infidels: one of which I undertake to refute, by showing that it is not religion, but theology, which has done all the mischief complained of so loudly and so justly. Genuine christianity was taught by God. Theological christianity is a religion that men have invented, and that has defeated the design, by pretending the authority of the former. Human passions, human interests, human fallibility, not those of particular doctors alone, but those of the church, œcumenically assembled, from the Nicæan council down to that of Trent, have had their share in composing the present intricate, inconsistent, and voluminous system. I can easily believe, that some of these divines meaned to preserve the purity of it, and to promote revealed religion. I can believe too, that such philosophers as Socrates and Plato, who contributed to destroy, while they pretended rather to reform polytheism and idolatry, meaned to restore the purity of theism, and to promote natural religion. But here a difference between them, which is very well founded, and worthy of observation, begins to arise. The latter could support their doctrines by no authority except their own. The former had always the pretence of spiritual gifts to authorise them.

Faith in Christ, the Messiah, is the first principle

ciple of christianity, an article as plain as it is essential. But there are other articles in the Gospel, darkly revealed, because doubtfully expressed; beside several in the other parts of the New Testament, the sense of which never has been fixed. Christian divines have supposed all these alike essential. They have supposed, that, as obedience is better than sacrifice, faith is as essential, or more essential than works: and every sect has supposed the understanding and believing these ambiguous passages, in the sense in which their teachers expound them, necessary to the salvation promised in the Gospel. Thus it happened formerly, and thus it happens still, that the objects of faith vary in every christian sect: and as neutrality in the civil contests of the Athenian commonwealth was branded with a note of infamy; so in these religious contests, as they are falsely called, he who takes no side is stigmatised for an infidel by all, and he who takes any side is given over for a heretick to the hangman here, and to the Devil hereafter, by every side except his own. In short, it is not enough to believe like a Christian, it is made necessary that men, women, and children should decide like metaphysicians, or believe without knowing what they believe.

If we may be allowed to think, and they who prefer the example and doctrine of Christ to those of Paul, will find reason to think, that the Messiah intended rather to reform, and to graft upon Judaism, than to abolish it; we may think too, that Socrates and Plato intended rather to reform paganism,

ganism, and to graft something less carnal, and more spiritual upon it, than by a more direct opposition to the rooted prejudices of their age and country to abolish them quite. This pious attempt cost the master his life, and made the scholar, perhaps, not only involve his doctrines in greater obscurity, but seem, at least in several instances, favourable to the absurdities of paganism. Socrates was a zealous missionary of morality: and the obligations of natural religion in publick and private life were taught and pressed upon men, both by him and Plato, not only from motives that reason suggests, but by inculcating the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, a doctrine the most usefully believed, and the most weakly proved, says Charron*; and of a future state of rewards and punishments, which they had learned from the Egyptians, among whom these doctrines had prevailed from an unknown antiquity, and not from the Jews, who could not derive these doctrines from Moses, and who do not appear to have entertained them till they began to tag their law with the scraps of philosophy.

Adoration of the Supreme Being, gratitude and resignation to the order of his providence, were the great internal duties of religion, that these philosophers taught: and it is easy to discern what they thought of external worship, by several passages in Plato. In his book of laws he directs indeed, that men should resort to the publick tem-

* De la Sagesse, l. 1, c. 5.

ples,

ples, deliver their victims and offerings to the priests, and sacrifice and pray there only. But even in that place, where he seems to have so much regard to the uniformity of publick worship, he hints sufficiently in what esteem he held it, by his invective against the superstition of private devotions; which, after all he says against them, were founded on the same principles, and performed on the same model as those of established and publick worship. He speaks most reasonably, in the second Alcibiades, of the regard God has to a pious disposition of mind, and humorously enough of this external worship, as of an account, that men pretend to keep with God, as with a banker or usurer; whereby acts of devotion performed, and benefits received, may be balanced. But the passage, I choose to cite, precedes these in the same dialogue. After showing that men asked things contrary, and even hurtful to them, Socrates commends the prayer of the poet, who asked Jupiter to grant his friends such things as were good for them, whether they prayed that they might have them or not, and to refuse such as were hurtful, even when they desired them. From hence he takes occasion to commend likewise the custom of the Lacedæmonians, who asked for good in general, and for nothing in particular, "pulchra cum bonis," in all their prayers, publick and private. They were not, however, he says, less happy than other people; and upon that occasion he tells Alcibiades a story, which he had heard from certain old men. The Athenians, being

being always beaten at land and at sea by the Lacedæmonians, consulted Jupiter Hammon to know why the gods were more favourable to their enemies, who did not worship them with the same pomp and expense as the Athenians did? Hammon answered, that the acclamations, that is, the prayers, of the Lacedæmonians pleased him better than all the religious rites and ceremonies of the other Greeks.

Not only the notions of these philosophers concerning divine worship, but their notions concerning the first principle of all religion, the existence of a Supreme Being, were much more conformable to right reason than any of those which prevailed at that time. There are many such scattered about in the writings of Plato, which the most orthodox theist might adopt. He acknowledged one Supreme Being, eternal, ineffable, incomprehensible, all-perfect, the selfexistent fountain of all existence divine and human, himself above all essence. God is truth, but above all truth; intelligent, as well as intelligible, but above all intelligence; good, but above all goodness. He is none of these, but the principle of them all, as the sun is the principle of light, and as he makes all things to be seen without being light or sight himself. In a word, Plato acknowledged the omniscience, the omnipresence, the infinite power and wisdom of God. These are very elevated sentiments, which may be collected from his writings. They are strained as high as the utmost pitch to which we can carry our ideas, and they point

point still higher. So they should; for after all the efforts that the mind of man is capable of making, our conceptions will fall infinitely short of their object; when this object is the majesty of the all-perfect Being. Neither Plato, nor they who received his philosophy four or five hundred years after his time, and who were even more extravagant and less intelligible than he, could push their general and abstract notions of this sort too far. The intellectual prospect is immense, and the intellectual sight must be strained, from objects clearly and distinctly perceived, to such as are less so, and from these, still farther; till it can be strained no more, and the mind is lost in the sublimity of its own conceptions.

If these speculations cannot discover, by infinite degrees, the whole truth, they cannot lead us into any errour, and they serve to maintain in our minds that awful sense, and that profound veneration of the Supreme Being, of the true God, in the unity of his nature, which are due to him from every intelligent creature. Thus far, therefore, and in this manner, Plato was an excellent master of natural theology. His errours, and those of all other pretenders to metaphysical theology, are owing to speculations of another kind, relative indeed to these, but pursued in a different spirit, the spirit of vain curiosity, and are hypothetical from the first, for want of real ideas whereon to set out. In a word, they are engraftments on the religion of nature and of reason, which neither nature nor reason can admit. Our world seems to be, in

many respects, the Bedlam of every other system of intelligent creatures, and with this unlucky circumstance, that they who are most mad, govern, in things of the greatest importance, those who are least so; and Charron might very well say*, that minds thought capable of prophecy, illumination, revelation, and admission into the secret councils of the gods, were such as extasy and enthusiasm transported, or sleep set on dreaming. The observation may be carried down from ancient to modern days, and may be verified by examples of christian as well as heathen fanaticks. There are, indeed, madmen little less ridiculous among those who pretend to be metaphysicians and theologians, great masters of reason, lovers of wisdom, instructors of mankind, and spiritual guides. It has been the pride and folly of these men in all ages to impose complete systems of knowledge on the world; whereas all human knowledge in it's utmost extent is deficient, and a system of this kind, that affects to be, and that appears to be complete, is therefore false. This folly prevailed most in the nonage of philosophy; for as men have risen in science, they have seen their ignorance better. It continues however still, in some degree, and appears, on some occasions, but is so predominant on none as on subjects that the first philosophy furnishes, on which every dabbler in theology, nay every old woman, "quædam "anicula christiana," to speak like Tertullian,

* Lib. 1, cap. 6.

is

is ready to explain very particularly the divine nature and attributes, the constitution of the spiritual, and the creation and government of the corporeal world, and to speak like another great doctor as well as heretick, the whole scheme, order, and state of things*.

Plato gave encouragement, and furnished matter to this presumption, by his engraftments on natural religion, by the extravagant notions which he propagated, and by his whole manner of philosophising. His works have stood in the place of his imaginary system of eternal ideas, and divines and metaphysicians, who have thought like Malebranche, that they consulted the Logos, and that they derived their knowledge from those abstract beings that reside in the divine intelligence, have consulted only Plato, and have derived from his writings all the whimsies that compose their fantastical science. They may have thought themselves rapped into a third Heaven, as St. Paul says, that he, or somebody that he knew, was, or that they rose in extasy, like Plotinus and Porphyry, up to a divine union; but we may assure ourselves, that they never were rapped into any Heaven but that of their own imagination, nor rose to any divine union but that with the divine Plato. To collect all the absurdities, and manifest inconsistencies and contradictions, that are to be found in his works, would be to write a treatise bigger, and as strong at least to the purpose

* Clarke, in his Evidenc.

as that of Plutarch on the repugnancies of the Stoicks. To separate, from what is reasonable and true in this philosophy, all the logical puerilities, all the false sublime, all the tedious and flimsy argumentations, that prove nothing, in a word, all that is unintelligible, or that informs us not when it is understood, would be a work something like to that which our Verulam* wished to see performed in one view, and Montaigne† in another; and if I mistake not, the vogue of Plato, the particular importance of some subjects, and the general hurt he has done to science by laying false foundations of it considered, this work would be more useful in a third view: it would show us to what miserable shifts the greatest men are reduced, since Plato is to be numbered among these, when they pretend to give complete systems of knowledge, divine and human, under the name of philosophy‡; when they assume unattainable knowledge to be attained, and that which is fantastical to be real. But this is a work we shall never see performed. Men, as dull or as mad as all the commentators and translators of Plato have been, are incapable of it, and men who are neither, will find themselves more agreeable employment.

Though this philosopher was not a friend to the polytheism and idolatry of the heathen world, he was not an enemy to superstition. Far from

* Advancem. of Lear. lib. 3. † Essays, chap. 12.

‡ Philosophia est divinarum et humanarum rerum scientia.

going about to destroy it, he refined, he spiritualised it, and intrenched it more in mystery. He made it more plausible, and more secure from the attacks to which it stood exposed before. He made use indeed, on some occasions, for ornament or illustration, of fables taken from the current mythology, like that of Love begot by Porus on Penia, when he was drunk in Jupiter's orchard, and the gods were met to celebrate the birth of Venus: but the divine mythology he taught purposely was not so gross. The gods of the heathen had been men. The sepulchres of these immortals were shown, and they retained in Heaven the passions, the manners, and the habits of the Earth. The celestial kingdom was peopled, like countries, by colonies from abroad, by naturalisations of foreigners, and by the generations of those who had been there so long, that they seemed the aborigines of the country. The gods of Plato were of another sort. They were generated indeed, for he supposed too a production and propagation of divinities; but the image of this generation was changed, and gods were said to be produced by emanation or procession; emanations from the first divine essence, like beams from the sun, processions, or rather extensions of the supreme and simple substance*, for thus they have been explained by the Platonicks. In some such incomprehensible, if not ineffable manner,

* Profusio quædam et extensio summæ et simplicis substantiæ.

(for what is ineffable to one of these philosophers?) souls, angels, and dæmons, were produced; by the supposed existence of the two last of which, visions and dreams, and every art of divination, and every superstition of magick, was upheld.

This little that I have said may stand as a general specimen of the Platonick theology in this place; for in another I shall give some that will be more particular. No man ever dreamed so wildly as this author writ—— "velut ægri somnia "vanæ finguntur species." But as he had no divine mission nor authority to claim, all this rested on his own authority: he was to prove it as he could, and every man was at liberty to receive or reject all or any of these doctrines as he found the proof. Thus they remained purely hypothetical, nor could be made dogmatical, till Christian divines made them so, by adopting them as parts of divine revelation. Then, indeed, they became dogmas to Christianity; and before that time, they were not such to many of the Heathens. They could not be such to Plato himself, whatever they were to some of his disciples. He, who published them, knew that he invented them, or that he borrowed them from those that did invent them, and that neither he nor they were led to them by any chain of knowledge. Neither he nor they could be the bubbles of these doctrines; though they who received them for true theology were so. It is not he who makes, but he who swallows the wine, that gets drunk. But as soon as Christians found some, and thought they

they found others of these doctrines in the Gospel, the difference I mentioned between the authority of these divines and that of the divines of paganism was complete. The authority of revelation confirming that of Plato, propositions that were dubious to the one became certain to the others, and philosophical conjectures became articles of faith: just as it happened afterward, when the authority of Aristotle was added to both, and new doctrines were devised, by metaphysical explanations and extensions, under pretence of defending the former.

Nothing less than this could have established and continued the theology of Plato. In his days, and long after them, philosophy was, for the most part, very hypothetical. Physicks were so. What wonder if metaphysicks were more, nay, wholly so? When Plato had brought these, and Aristotle logick, into repute, one of them made the material world metaphysically, the other logically, and both very absurdly. But when they set themselves, and Plato especially, to raise an immaterial intellectual world, metaphysical and logical architecture were most properly employed. They could employ no other: they knew little, imagined much, built beyond nature; and terms and phrases, which supported their schemes, covered equally the deficiency and the futility of their matter, not unlike to those columns and entablatures of painted pasteboard, that imitate the solidity of marble and deceive the eye. This was the least laborious, the shortest and surest way to

fame: and while men neglected the analyse of ideas, and attended to the forms of argumentation, it was no hard matter to throw words into such forms as were sufficient to keep up dispute in the defence of any doctrines. An hypothesis, plausible to the reason, or to the prejudices, or to the predominate affections and passions of men, formed a sect; and as soon as a sect was formed, the hypothesis became a demonstrated system, which the honour of the sect was concerned to maintain. There were many such among the Greeks, and they were all defended and attacked with equal obstinacy, till time and contest wore them out. If Platonism was not better founded in reason and knowledge than others, it was kept up long with greater art, and had greater good fortune afterward. Plato gave occasion to both. To the first directly, and by choice. To the last indirectly, and by chance. His immediate successors, Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemo, Crates, Crantor, had acquired no great fame, nor had any great success. The portick and the gardens of Epicurus rivalled the academy, in opposing dogma to dogma. Arcesilaus therefore and Carneades changed the conduct of this philosophical war. By affirming nothing, they left their adversaries nothing to attack; and by assuming, in consequence, the right of disputing against every thing, they were at liberty to take their advantage wherever they found it. The example of their founder, and of his master, suggested their expedient to them, and countenanced them

in

in the use of it. They became terrible to the Stoicians, and to the Epicureans, and to all the Dogmatists.

As these men pretended to revive the first academy, by reverting to scepticism, though they were called authors of a second and a third, and therefore academick philosophers, so there were others, who, under pretence of adhering to the first academy, professed themselves dogmatists, and affected to be named Platonicians. Some of these men indeed became peripateticks, or slided from Platonism into Stoicism, like the philosopher Antiochus, whom Tully mentions*; while the suspension of assent was still maintained, as the true principle of the academy old and new, by Clitomachus, Philo, and Tully. Varro says in the Academicks, there was no difference between peripateticks, certain dogmatists no doubt, and the old academy†. Tully says, that the academy they called the new appeared to him to be the same as the old‡. Thus the matter stood in Greece and at Rome. But the Platonism that prevailed in Asia and Egypt, and was taught in the famous school of Alexandria, was unquestionably dogmatical in every point. If the philosophers in those countries did not find it, they made it such. It could not otherwise have suited

* In Academ.

† Nihil enim inter peripateticos, et illam veterem academiam, differebat.

‡ Hanc academiam novam appellabant, quæ mihi vetus videtur.

the

the characters, nor have answered the purposes of Jews, of Christians, and of those who opposed christianity: by all of whom it was, in some degree, and in a different manner, adopted, according to the method of the eclectick sect, that Potamo of Alexandria founded. The object of this sect was very specious. These philosophers were to select the best and truest placits from all others. But we may conclude, that they selected, conformably to the human character, such as agreed best with their own opinions, according to the account Diogenes Laertius* gives of Potamo, that he chose those things that pleased him most. Thus the Jews took some dogmas, the Christians more, and the Pagans most of all, from Plato's philosophy; which became accidentally of greater extent, duration, and importance than the author had reason to expect.

There are many things unintelligible in the ancient philosophers, many inconsistent and contradictory, even among those who wrote with the greatest clearness and precision; for I except neither Cicero nor Seneca. It would be time well saved to neglect the first, and nothing can be more ridiculous than the pains that learned men take to disguise or reconcile the others, instead of owning them to be, what after all their pains they are forced to leave them, inconsistencies and contradictions. But Plato has this peculiar advantage over all the philosophers of any name.

* In Præfat.

He

He has puzzled mankind, not only by particular passages in his writings, but about his own general character as an author. The dogmatists, and the scepticks, for such in truth the academicians were, have claimed him: and it is at this hour a problematical point at least, whether this great philosopher and divine gave a full assent to the truth of his own doctrines. To all of them, to some of the principal, he could not. They were the fruits of his own and of other men's invention; and he must have been conscious that they were so, as I observed above.

SECT. XIV.

It is in itself of little moment in what spirit, and on what motive, Plato writ, who, or what he was. The weight of reason, and not the authority of an author, should decide our opinions *: and this philosopher himself speaks very strongly to this purpose, in many places, in the Gorgias particularly. If a doctrine, which Plato taught, be supported by reason or revelation, we ought to receive it with that assent which is due to truth †; though he were a sceptick, under the mask of a dogmatist. If any of his doctrines are sup-

* Non tam auctores——quam rationis momenta quærenda sunt. Cic. de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

† ——Alii alios se convincere arbitrantur, cum——multos et celebres testes produxerint——verum hæc probationis ratio nullius est momenti ad veritatem, &c.

ported

ported neither by reason nor revelation, we ought to reject them; though he were a dogmatist under the mask of a sceptick. This is evident: and yet christian divines have been, in all ages, as zealous to make him pass for a dogmatist, as if nothing more was necessary to establish the truth of a doctrine, than to be assured that he thought it true, and taught it as such. In the mean time, they did not enough consider, that they made a fool or a knave of their favourite philosopher. Wrong methods of inquiring after truth and knowledge, and frequent contentions about them, ended in a dispute at last, not whether there was any such thing as truth, but whether there was any such thing as knowledge. From hence arose dogmatists, acatalepticks, and scepticks*. If Plato was one of the former, who boasted, that they had found the truth, and if there can be on every subject one opinion alone true, how came he to have different opinions on the same subject, not transiently nor inadvertently mentioned, but formally delivered and maintained? In the other two characters, if he believed all things to be absolutely incomprehensible, or if he restrained his assent, because, though he did not deny, that truth might be found, he did not determine neither, that it had been found; in these two cha-

* Ex philosophis alii se verum adinvenisse jactant, et dogmatici appellantur. Alii pronunciant, verum nec inveniri nec percipi posse, et acataleptici dicuntur.——Alii, assensum sustinentes, neque statuunt verum inventum esse, neque inveniri posse negant, et dicuntur sceptici, considerators, et ephectici, cohibitores assensûs.

racters,

racters, I say, he might very fairly, though not very usefully, deliver contrary opinions, and defend or oppose any of them hypothetically. But neither the supposition of two doctrines, nor of two senses, nor of two characters, in Plato, that stale artifice by which criticks make authors say or not say whatever they please, will excuse him as a dogmatist, if he was one, and a dogmatist too who treated the most important points of knowledge, since the being of a God, the worship of him, the first principles of things, and the conduct of providence, were some of the objects of it.

My way of thinking, which I have found no where the least reason to alter, would hinder me from any farther consideration of Plato in this respect, if it was not worth our while to consider how feebly the authorities we value the most are often founded. The fathers of the Christian church have maintained, that Plato was a dogmatist, and well they might; since Numenius, a Pythagorean philosopher, asserted the same of Pyrrho, and since Sextus Empiricus says *, that Arcesilaus was suspected to be another. With the paradox concerning Pyrrho I have nothing to do; but surely it is as little possible to imagine what grounds Sextus, who lived four hundred years after Arcesilaus, or St. Austin, who lived above a century later, or indeed any man of his own age, country, or school, could have to make

* Lib. 1, cap. 31.

a dog-

a dogmatist of one who disclaimed all knowledge like him, even that which Socrates excepted, the knowledge of his ignorance, as it is to imagine what Numenius meaned when he imputed dogmatism to Pyrrho. A man who made it the business of his life, and the principle of his profession, to dispute against every proposition that could be advanced, was not surely a sceptick in appearance alone, "primâ fronte," as Sextus says, but inwardly and in very good earnest. Notwithstanding this, St. Austin* took the fact for granted, and wrote up in his warm imagination a very subtile and pious scheme of policy, which is almost too fanciful for the saint, and which no man, less visionary than he can believe, that the philosopher ever entertained. Some such there have been, however, and a reverend father † of the oratory in France has treated this whimsy very seriously.

The Stoicians then, according to St. Austin, placing the chief happiness of man in virtue, that is, in the mind; the Epicureans placing it in volupty, that is, in the body; and the Platonist placing it in the enjoyment of God; the latter judged very wisely, that it was proper to prepare the way to truth by destroying, in the first place, the errours of those sects. They saw, that their own sublime doctrine would fall into contempt, if they published it among men immersed in sense, like the Epicureans, or even among the Stoicians,

* Ep. ad Diosc. Ep. 118, Ed. Bened.

† Thomassin de la Manière d'Etudier la Philos.

who

who gave the preference, indeed, to virtue, but who could not raise their conceptions up to something divine and immaterial, to something above mind as above body, to something knowable by pure intellect, and yet far superior to it, that is, up to God. They knew that they should not be heard, if they went about to teach men who believed atoms, or the four elements, to be the first principles of all things, that all things proceeded from an immaterial Wisdom *. They considered farther, that the Epicureans being persuaded their senses never deceived them, and the Stoicians believing, like the Aristotelians, that although their senses might sometimes deceive them, yet they could not acquire, without the assistance of their senses, any knowledge of the truth of things, it would be to little purpose to tell either the one or the other, that the only Being, which has a real existence, cannot be represented to the mind by any of the images of sense, and that this immutable Being is that alone which we conceive truly; because pure intellect, which alone perceives the truth of things, alone perceives the existence of this Being.

Now since Arcesilaus could not flatter himself, that these sublime doctrines would be received, against the philosophical prejudices that prevailed in his time, it behoved him to look forward, and

* N. B. This is said purely to do honour to Plato, for he was absurd enough to make matter and ideas first principles jointly with God.

to convey the pure streams that flowed from the springs Plato had opened, as St. Austin * expresses himself in one of his letters, through a channel shaded and covered by brambles and thorns, lest they should be exposed to beasts that would render them foul and muddy. Nothing less than a submissive faith, such a faith as he mentions in his letter to Consentius † a faith that must precede reason in order to purify the heart, and to prepare the mind to comprehend what it ought to admit implicitly at first, could impose such doctrines, and nothing less than the authority of one who was God and man could impose such a faith. Now the Platonicians could produce no authority of this kind, nor show a God abased and humbled before the coming of Christ. They were, in the right, therefore, to conceal their doctrines, till this great event happened. But as soon as it happened, they opened the whole secret of their theology and metaphysicks. Some of them, indeed, were corrupted by the damnable curiosity of magick. But many of them acknowledged Jesus to be that God and man, in whom immutable wisdom and truth were incarnated, and by whose mouth the eternal essence had spoken to mankind.

Such are the notions that St. Austin endeavours to give in some of his epistles, and in his books against the academicks, to establish the opinion,

* To Hermog. Ep. 1, Ed. Benedic.

† Ep. 120, Ed. Benedic.

that

that Plato was a dogmatist, and to account for the conduct of his sceptical followers. But this ingenious scheme hangs ill together. What has been said above concerning the motive, that Arcesilaus had to make a publick profession of scepticism, seems much more probable, than what our African bishop advances. Plato had rivals and enemies among the philosophers, Aristippus and Diogenes the cynick, for instance, who embarrassed him more than once. But in his time, and for some time after him, no school grew up that could vie with his. Aristotle, who founded one that became famous, heard Plato twenty years, that is, till Plato died. Epicurus did not come to Athens till Xenocrates was at the head of the academy, nor begin to teach so soon; and Zeno and Arcesilaus were scholars of Polemo at the same time. Thus far the course of the academy glided smoothly on. But here the contest began; and the subtilties of the portick were the more to be feared by Arcesilaus, because Zeno, who set up this rival school, had been received in the academy, and had learned, like a spy, where and how it might be attacked with most advantage. Other dogmatick sects grew up and strengthened at the same time: and the surest way to divert their attacks was, to attack them all on this one principle established by Socrates, "nihil sciri, "nihil percipi posse." If Arcesilaus had gone about to defend his master's doctrines, which were not easy to be defended, surrounded as he was by enemies, he must have been beat on every side;

whereas by renouncing all pretensions to knowledge, he had nothing to defend, had no recrimination to fear, and might attack with his whole force. We may add, perhaps, a motive of pique to this of policy; for beside that Arcesilaus was piqued personally by Zeno, who employed the arms he had acquired in the academy against that school, nothing could be more provoking than the arrogance wherewith the Stoicks exacted the same assent to their most extravagant paradoxes, as the mind gives to truths, that are objects even of intuitive knowledge. Thus we may easily conceive, that it happened in philosophy on this occasion, as it has happened in religion on many. Excess on one side produces excess on the other. So Sabellianism gave occasion to Arianism, and the foppery of Rome to the rusticity of Geneva. So the dogmatical presumption of Zeno, who affirmed the world to be a rational animal, as confidently as he affirmed it to be light at noon *, pushed Arcesilaus to deny every kind and degree of knowledge.

But it is not enough to have shown, that this account is probable, unless a short and obvious reflection be added to show, that it is impossible the motives St. Austin assigns to the conduct of Arcesilaus and the academicks should be true. Now, I ask, whether these philosophers could mean to conceal the doctrines of Plato, which had

* ——Nec magis apparebit nunc lucere, quoniam stoicus, quàm hunc mundum esse sapientem. Acad.

been

been publickly taught by more of his successors than St. Austin mentions, and which were contained in his writings. They might abandon the defence of these doctrines, and show little regard to them, but they could not mean to conceal them, and reserve them for a more proper conjuncture, as St. Austin asserts. They might do so the rather, and with a due regard to the honour of their founder, since, by abandoning these, they did not abandon him. He had jumbled two opposite characters most preposterously together. He was sometimes apparently a dogmatist, and made even Socrates talk in that style. But still the known sceptical character of the master was the real character of the scholar. This character, therefore, Arcesilaus and Carneades assumed, as soon as it was for the honour and interest of their school to abandon the other, and deemed themselves, no doubt, more truly, Platonicians, than any of those who had been at the head of the academy before them. I confound Arcesilaus and Carneades together, as Tully does; for though there might be some difference, which I will not have the trouble of considering, between the notions Carneades had, and those of Arcesilaus, concerning the causes of incomprehensibility; yet they both maintained, with equal zeal, and Carneades, it is said, with greater force of argument, that we are unable to arrive at the truth of things by sense or by reason.

If Socrates was not so great a genius, even with the help of his dæmon, as he has been represented,

he was certainly something better than a genius. He was a very good man: and I find in myself an unwillingness to believe him absolutely a sceptick, both on this account, and on account of that predilection, which you know that another good man, our friend, the bishop of Cloyne, has for him. That he might be such, as to physicks and all the sciences which the Greeks called mathematicks or disciplines *, I can easily believe. Xenophon gave the lie to Plato, and all those who pretended that he taught them; and Socrates himself complained bitterly, when he heard the Lysis read †, of Plato's misrepresentations. No philosopher could be so easily, nor so safely, misrepresented. He preached, but he did not write: and we know nothing more of his philosophy than the scraps his auditors retained, some of which Xenophon has given us more truly, and Plato more copiously. He picked up scholars occasionally in the streets and publick places of Athens, and was a missionary of virtue to them all, from Alcibiades down to the meanest citizen. He rather refuted the sophists, than laboured to instruct directly: and this he did by a perpetual dissimulation of his own opinions, and an ironical deference to theirs; which manner might give an air of scepticism to all he said, even on moral subjects. In short, if I cannot believe him a dogmatist, I will not believe him an absolute sceptick.

* Aul. Gellius. † Diog. Laertius.

Socrates

Socrates may be compared to the Cimmerians, who were deprived of the light of the sun, but were not in utter darkness. He founded his ethicks on probability if you please; but it was on such a probability as Tully explains in his reply to Lucullus; such a probability as a wise man must rest upon, or all the rules of life will be subverted. If this was so, the difference between Socrates, and Arcesilaus, and Carneades was very great. They did not admit, at least the former did not, the faint light of probability, and could be scarce distinguished from those who professed Pyrrhonism: though St. Austin thought fit to employ even the former, very piously, in preparing the way for the reception of the Gospel; for which he had no authority whatever, except that of his own wild imagination. For the dogmatism of Socrates and Plato, and for a distinction between the old and new academy, he had some indeed. Cicero introduces Lucullus, in the academical questions, comparing Arcesilaus to Tiberius Gracchus, and complaining, that as one of these disturbed the peace of an excellent commonwealth, so the other overturned philosophy, when it was brought to perfection. But Tully decides the controversy, without regard to probable arguments, by an appeal to fact. He had a bigot veneration for Plato. He had studied his works so long, and had familiarised himself with them so much, that he seemed to have lived with this philosopher, "ut penè cum his vixisse "videar;" as he says of himself. He knew

Plato better than St. Austin, and he asserted, that the new academy was the same as the old *, if Plato, who founded it, was to be reckoned of the old, in whose works nothing was affirmed, who disputed for and against many things, inquired about all, and advanced none as certain †.

If Plato must be reckoned, notwithstanding this, a dogmatist, it will be equally impossible to justify the regard, that the Christian fathers, most of them at least, paid to him themselves, and that they encouraged others to pay, nor the use that they made of his writings. They who called him the Homerical philosopher thought more justly of him, than they who called him the Attick Moses, or than they who, still more profanely, put him and Plotinus, and even Jesus Christ, in matters of doctrine, on a level ‡. By doing this they defiled christianity with many superstitious notions, and mixed their theology up with much of that imaginary science about divine, angelical, and human natures, which was derived from Egypt and the East, through Pythagoras and Plato chiefly, to the Greeks and the Romans, and from these two philosophers, through the school of Alexandria more than any other way; for dogmatical Platonism, which included both, flourished in that school more than

* Academiam novam, quæ mihi vetus videtur.

† Nihil affirmatur—in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quæritur, nihil certi dicitur.

‡ Vide Ep. Nebridii ad Augus.

it

it had ever done in the academy; to the whole christian world.

But farther, and to set this proceeding off in all the colours it deserves, are we sure that Plato, though a dogmatist, was much in earnest on every point of theology which the fathers of the church took from him, and incorporated into the Christian system, as explanatory of it, or additional to it? He might not be so most certainly. Descartes was dogmatist enough in all conscience; and yet, without derogating from this part of his character, we may believe, that he was not very serious when he revived the whimsical notion of Gomez Pereyra, that beasts are automates, or pieces of clockwork, nor, perhaps, when he maintained the plenum. He had his particular reasons of prudence, to shelter himself from some attacks, that he might apprehend, and of consistency to make the hypothetical parts of his philosophy hang the better together, as well as of conformity to certain received opinions. Plato might have reasons of the same, or of other kinds. It would not be hard to point out some such; and if he had no other, philosophical observation alone, and the desire of acquiring fame by the publication of a new and more sublime system, for so all things that are unintelligible in metaphysical theology are called, would have determined him to ransack ancient legends, as well as his own imagination, for every thing that might serve to this purpose. We may believe this the more easily, since there runs through all his works a

tinselled embroidery of this kind, on a ground of low conceits and tedious irony:

" Purpureus, latè qui splendeat, unus, et alter
" Adfuitur pannus."

Now if Plato may be justly suspected of such a proceeding, how ridiculous, as well as absurd and profane, ought we to esteem that of the fathers of the church? If the doctrines of Plato are conformable to the Gospel, which I think they are not exactly in any one instance, except in some of the moral doctrines, it is absurd: if they are different, or more extensive in any respect, it is profane to make them a supplemental code to the evangelical system of faith. But if he publishes things, that were neither dictated to him by his reason, nor even believed by him, whatever these things were, and how true soever they might appear on some other authority, it was sovereignly ridiculous to accept them in any degree for such on his. Of all this absurdity, profaneness, and ridicule, they who built up christian theology were guilty. Instead of commenting Platonism by christianity, they commented christianity by Platonism. Instead of applying revelation to explain, and the authority of the revealer to confirm, what they thought to be true in his writings, they applied Platonick philosophy to introduce and explain christian, and the authority of Plato to confirm what they received for true on the authority of Christ. They added the

Epistles

Epistles to the Gospels, the doctrines of Paul to those of Christ; and to all these, the reveries of heathen philosophy, rabinical extravagance, and christian enthusiasm, till the Apocalypse became a part of our Holy Scriptures, and the Athanasian Creed a summary of our faith.

SECT. XV.

I DO not expect, on this occasion, from you the answer I should be sure to have from persons more orthodox than I know you to be, in the faith of the pretended catholick church. Such persons would insist on the authority of the church, by which all this heathen lore has been sanctified, and ground this authority on passages of the Scriptures, as they ground the authority of the Scriptures on that of the church. This circular proof would deserve no other answer than that of silent contempt. Clement of Alexandria opens another way, to justify himself, and other fathers, for adopting so much heathen theology into christianity. He supposes every system of Grecian and Barbarian philosophy to have been a branch of the eternal truth*, and all these branches to have been united in the christian system, like the trunk of a tree of all divine truth. Thus the doctrines of heathen theology, that were taught by Plato and Pythagoras, and derived

* —Æternæ veritatis avulsam quandam particulam. Strom. lib. 1.

from

from Egypt and the East, are not sanctified by a sort of retroactive power, but are made divine by their original. If now by these terms we do not understand, that the human mind rises up to the supreme mind, is united with it, and contemplates the ideas that are in it; if we do not understand, that the intelleet of man is a part of the intellect of God, as the soul of man was thought to be a part of the deity, or of the soul of the universe; in short, if we do not understand them according to any of those mystical, metaphysical notions, that Platonism propagated, and that Clement was very likely to intend, they are capable of receiving a very true sense. There are, no doubt, in theology some truths, that human reason, the gift of God, and in this sense alone divine, is sufficient to demonstrate, according to those criterions of human knowledge, the things that are, and that we know to be as the Author of all nature ordained that they should appear to creatures in our rank of being. Several such truths the Pagan philosophers discovered. But then they blended them with monstrous errours, derived from various extremes, by planning the divine order and œconomy on the human, or by neglecting the phænomena of nature, or by making extravagant hypotheses to account for them. They discovered the unity of the Godhead, and they saw that worship is due from the creature to the creator. But then they ran into ditheism, and gave up the unity, that they might save the goodness of the Supreme

Being, which they imagined very falsely to be, as atheists objected that it was, inconsistent with the phænomena. They ran farther into polytheism, that they might provide a multitude of agents or ministers to execute the will of God, and to govern under him, or to be mediators and intercessors with him in behalf of mankind. As they took notions of mediation and intercession, so they took others of atonement and expiation, from the characters of men and of governments. Hence the offerings and sacrifices, sanguinary sacrifices, human sacrifices, such as the Carthaginians, our Druids, the Mexicans, and other barbarous people have instituted; from which examples of the utmost depravation of human reason, that ignorance, superstition, and habits of cruelty can beget, divines would sometimes prove, that such sacrifices, and the appeasing of God by blood*, are agreeable to the natural reason of mankind.

It must be confessed, however, that even in those days men, whose natural reason was not thus depraved, saw by the light of reason alone how abominable such rites as these were, and little by little, as their reason improved, how absurd all their other rites, and almost all theological opinions were†. Polytheism was mitigated; idolatry

* Vid. Thomassin. Manière d'Etudier la Philosoph. &c.

† It may be worth while to observe here what is said by a very great and worthy man, in a book writ on the principles of Hutchinson, to show, that christianity is indeed very near as

idolatry was in good measure distinguished away, among the philosophers at least. Oracles and the arts of divination grew into contempt: and if heathenism was kept up by men above the vulgar, it seemed to be so only by the priests for lucre, and by others for fear of having no religion at all. Thus the way was prepared by reason for revelation, in the countries where christianity first appeared, and which were enlightened by philosophy. Philosophy had begun to spiritualise religion, by exploding many of the gross, the carnal conceptions of heathen theology, and by substituting an inward devotion, purity of heart, and a pious disposition of mind, to the outward pomp and ceremony of worship. That this representa-

as old as the creation. He admits, that this belief is of all others the most unreasonable, except as it is explained in the original. What now is the original, by the explanation of which this belief becomes reasonable? It was the decree of God, that a Saviour should die to atone by his blood for the sins of men. It was therefore his command, that to keep this revelation in mind, the future sacrifice of the Saviour should be emblematically and prophetically represented by shedding the blood of beasts in sacrifices, accompanied with many typical and emblematical circumstances. No other invention could be so likely to preserve and perpetuate the knowledge and belief of a revelation so necessary to mankind. Strange absurdities! the bloody sacrifice to be made so many thousand years afterward was that of the Son of God, of the very God, and the emblematical institution continued among men, who soon forgot that it was typical and emblematical only. Thus it served to no other purpose, than to lead men into an opinion, that the deity was implacable, and sins unforgivable, unless he was appeased, and they were atoned for by the shedding of blood.

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tion is true, the works of Plato alone would be sufficient to prove: although Eusebius* was desirous to make it believed, that no reformation had been made even in the opinions of philosophers, before christianity: but that, being then grown ashamed of their polytheism and idolatry, they endeavoured to conceal them under the pretence and disguise of allegory. In all cases, when christianity was once established, the means of carrying this reformation of opinions to perfection were in the hands of christian philosophers and divines. It might have been expected too, that revelation would unite, in one uniform system of theology, all the converted Pagans, whom reason had not been able to reconcile; since they had now, in the Word of God, a sure criterion, by which to try the truth of their opinions.

The very contrary happened. They differed as much as ever, and with uncharitableness and hatred that had been unknown to them before their conversion. While they were Pagans, they disputed without quarrelling, and even embraced opposite sects without becoming enemies. We see the Stoick, the Epicurean, and the academick meeting amicably together in Tully's works, which represent the manners of the age. They endeavour to refute one another; but they live in the utmost intimacy of friendship: and if Carneades was exasperated against the Stoicks, on account of their dogmatical, and, as we may venture to pronounce,

* Præp. Evangel.

their

their trifling but assuming airs, neither Tully nor Cotta were so*. Nay, the former inclined, as much as an academick could incline, to stoicism: and Seneca, who was professedly of this sect, and he, speak often with the greatest regard of Epicurus, and with the greatest tenderness of their Epicurean friends.

How it came to pass, that men, who had embraced opposite opinions without acrimony, while they were heathens, became inveterate enemies for this very reason, when they were Christians, or how they came to be more divided than ever, even when they had one common rule of faith and doctrine which they all acknowledged alike, is not very hard to conceive. While they were merely philosophers, they were attached to some sect or other, not only by the allusions of their own imaginations, by their affections and passions, by ambition and private interest, but by prejudices and habits contracted early, and sometimes before they were able to judge for themselves. To this sect, whichever it was, they adhered: and that which we may observe frequently in the political struggles of our miserable parties, happened, no doubt, in those theological contentions †. A false point of honour prevailed sometimes

* ——Contra quorum disciplinam ingenium ejus, Carneadis, exarserat. Tusc. Disp. l. 5.

† ——Cæteri primum antè tenentur adstricti, quàm, quid esset optimum, judicare potuerunt.—— infirmissimo tempore ætatis, aut obsecuti amico cuidam, aut unâ alicujus, quem primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant,

times over the love of truth; it determined the will even against the judgment: and men chose rather to err with those with whom they had long erred, than go right in new company, or alone. But still as they were mere philosophers, and had nothing but reason, their own, or that of their party, to oppose to reason, in every instance, in which they differed, and as the particular opinions of no one sect interested the whole body of philosophers, the state or the church in any country, these men might differ, before their conversion to christianity, without those incentives to uncharitableness and hatred, which acted so powerfully on the malignity of their hearts afterward. As soon as this malignity could exert itself, under the specious pretence of zeal for the honour of God and for the purity of the faith, it broke out with violence. Every side assumed, that the Word of God spoke in favour of them, that the salvation of souls depended on believing as they believed, and that all those who dissented from them were guilty of heresy; for this word grew soon into fashion, and from having, as I believe, a very innocent signification at first, it came, like the word tyrant, and some others, to convey a very odious idea at last. Hereticks then were enemies to God, and rebels to his law. They were to be treated as such by the orthodox: and

dicant, et ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhærescunt. Acad. Quæst.

heresy

heresy and orthodoxy being determined by the strength and weakness of parties, alternate, and, therefore, constant persecution was established in the church of Christ.

SECT. XVI.

If we inquire after the causes of that strange multiplication of sects, which have grown up from the apostolical age to this, among Christians, it seems to me, that they are to be found in the metaphysical madness of philosophers mixing with the enthusiasm of the first Christians, in the cabalistical practice of giving different senses to the same passages of Holy Writ, in the uncertainty of tradition, and in the use, that a distinct order of men has made, in every christian state, of these and other circumstances, to acquire dominion over private conciences.

Men run naturally from extreme to extreme. The farther they have gone into one, the more likely it is, that when they recover from it they will hurry as far into another: so that reformation is often nothing more than a change of errour. Thus it happened in the Pagan theology. The professors of it, and the people in general, had acknowledged a divine nature; which was human nature under a different name, and placed in a different habitation. Their divinities, from Momus the son of night, up to Jupiter the father of gods and men, were in truth celestial and immortal

mortal men, endued with more knowledge, and with more and greater powers; but with all these after the manner of men, and divested neither of human passions nor of human vices. These objects of adoration were monstrous. So was the worship paid to them. But then, as fast as philosophers exploded these corporal notions, for such they may be properly called, of the divine nature, and endeavoured to spiritualise it in their thoughts by abstraction from the human, they refined theology, with much confusion and obscurity of ideas, from a system of physical into a system of metaphysical fables: and a sort of intellectual mythology took the place of the former. Mythology, properly so called, served in the infancy of science to conceal the ignorance of philosophers. Of the cosmogonia they made a theogonia. Such the poets taught, and multiplied polytheism by their supposed science, and very real flattery. Allegory succeeded, and served to conceal the absurdity of theology. They who taught it grew as mad as their predecessors had been absurd, and very little less profane. The few remains of Pythagorean doctrines, the metaphysical and theological parts of Plato's writings, and above all those of the latter Pythagoreans and Platonicians which are in our hands, will justify what is here advanced; for surely, no men who were thought to be in their senses, and were suffered to go about without their keepers, did ever talk such nonsense as is to be found in Porphyry, Plotinus, Jamblicus, and those who

have been infected with the same phrensy. Such of these philosophers as opposed christianity, opposed to the marvellous of this theology the marvellous of their own, and none of our angelical or seraphick doctors, none of our ravished mysticks, ever rose higher in illuminations, visions, and rapturous unions with the divinity, than some of them. On the other hand, many of these philosophers became converts in different manners. Platonism mixed easily with christianity; but they who retained most of the former, infected the latter with innumerable errours, and planted or watered all the heresies, that started up daily in the first ages of the church. Such were the Gnosticks or the learned, who, under pretence of improving, corrupted the simplicity of the religion they had embraced. They who became afterward the greatest lights of the church, apologists, confessors, saints, and martyrs, were determined to christianity by their philosophy, as well as the others, and came full fraught with Platonism into the holy pale. But they used it more modestly. They made it the handmaid, not the rival of christianity: and though this handmaid governed the family, and took a principal share in ordering the whole scheme and œconomy of it, yet the authority of the mistress was always pretended. Justin owns, that Platonism prepared him to be a Christian; and Origen, a man far superior to the good martyr, ran as platonically mad, in the second century, as Picus of Mirandola, Ticinus, Patricius, or any of the renowned Platonicians, in the

the fifteenth. I know not whether the despair of attaining any other way a full knowledge of divine truths, which Socrates and Plato had so often inculcated, might not dispose these men to receive a revelation, to prefer faith to uncertainty, and, since they could not fix their minds on these subjects by reason, to fix them by authority, as the disciples of Pythagoras did.

Though I ascribe so much to the mere influence of philosophy, and believe it to have been the frantick mother of a frantick offspring, I do not mean to exclude absolutely that of grace, on this occasion, though I confess, that I have no conception of it, nor to deny, that this directed, in some measure, the other; and, to prove that I do not, I will quote the example and authority of St. Austin, to show how these two cooperated in him, and how the first prepared him, by God's immediate appointment, for the last, in one of the most sublime articles of christian faith. The saint laments, in the seventh book of his Confessions, the grievous errours in which he had been engaged concerning the divine nature, and the original of evil, on both of which he had followed the opinions of the Manichæans. He relates the steps by which he was delivered from these errours, as well as from the superstition of astrology and divination, and the approaches he made to truth by the helps that God procured him. After this he breaks out into ejaculations of thanks to God, who had taken pity on him, and had procured him some books of Platonick philosophy, wherein he

found the divinity of the Word established by many arguments. Of the incarnation of the Word, indeed, he found nothing. But he found it afterward in the Scriptures, and he remained persuaded, that God had prepared him, by this accidental information, for what he was to learn when he should study the Scriptures concerning the humiliation of the Word made flesh*; the reasons of which persuasion he gives in the twentieth chapter. Thus you see how Plato, in the wanderings of a wild imagination, had discovered, in part at least, one of the greatest mysteries of christianity, and how God made use of this truth, which he who published it did not know to be such, for the conversion of one of the greatest doctors and saints of the church. What wonder is it, that metaphysicks, the very dotage of philosophy, should bear witness to some of those truths, which may come out of the mouths of babes and sucklings?

SECT. XVII.

ANOTHER cause of the multiplication of extravagant opinions and sects in christianity has

* Miseratus es terram et cinerem——procurasti mihi per quendam hominem, immanissimo typho turgidum, quosdam Platonicorum libros ex Græca lingua in Latinam versos, et ibi legi &c.——non quidem his verbis, sed hoc idem omnino multis et multiplicibus suaderi rationibus, quod in principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum, et Deus erat Verbum——in quos me propterea priusquam Scripturas tuas considerarem, credo voluisti incurrere, ut imprimeretur, &c.

been

been the arbitrary practice of giving different senses to the same passages of the Bible. A practice derived from the Jewish masters, the worst certainly that can be followed if we seek the truth, and are desirous to preserve any precision either in fact or argument. Among the lowest artifices, that have been employed by those who seek to impose their own inventions under some other and better authority than their own, this has been one of the lowest and grossest, though not the least successful. It is in truth a kind of forgery, since it serves to make an author say what he had no intention to say, or renders, at the best, uncertain what he did intend to say, when he writ with the greatest clearness. The Jewish rabbins have done by the old, and our Christian rabbins by the New and Old Testament both, what Peter did by his father's will, in our friend Swift's Tale of a Tub. The text was against him, but by a new combination of the same words, or syllables, or letters, he made it speak for him and support his claim. It had been well if Martin and John, and the rest of Peter's brethren, for he had many more which the historian thought it not worth his while to mention, had stood their ground like good Caraites, and had adhered to the text in the plain and obvious meaning of it, instead of imitating the very men whom they have opposed, and whom they laugh at. But they have done otherwise. They have supported their decisions by the same unjustifiable means, by which the rabbinist Peter supported his. Nay, they

have done more, they have admitted divers codicils, and have, like him, supposed them to be of equal authority with the will, though it is plain, that the father speaks in the will, and his stewards or other domesticks in the codicils. Allow me another comparison. It may illustrate the folly, as the former explains the fraud, of this practice. The Chinese reverence much the table of Fohi, which must be nine or ten centuries older than Adam, according to their chronology. This table consists of several lines, some shorter, some longer, and placed in a certain order like that of a diagram or scheme, serving, as they imagine, to the design or demonstration of the most sublime knowledge. The learned men among them have been employed several thousand years in attempts to draw some of this sublime knowledge out of the table. The way they have taken, and what other could they take, if they had leisure enough to take any? has been to make all the possible transpositions, and different combinations of these lines, in hopes of affixing some sense to this mystical table. The consequence has been, that they have affixed several, and that they agree in none. Now, though I am persuaded, that the accounts the Jesuits* give us of this table are imperfect, and that something more than barely these unequal lines, something hieroglyphical, at least, belongs to it; yet whether it be so or no, the anecdote is equally

* Scien. Sinica.

apposite

apposite to my purpose: for in either case, the Chinese and the Christian criticks have been employed alike. If the table consists of unintelligible lines, and it would be the same if it consisted of unintelligible words, whereof Fohi has given no clew to explain and determine the sense, the Chinese criticks have been employed just as reasonably as the Christian expositors of mysteries, neither fully nor plainly revealed by revelation itself. If it be said, that the table, which none but he who made it could explain, explains itself, as our Scriptures do in all the essential parts of them, the comparison holds still; for the learned Chinese must have done, as the learned Christians have done, and have made mysteries for some purpose or other where they found none. It is impossible, by any means that art can find, to see in the dark; but it is easy to contrive glasses, that shall show the plainest and most uniform object in a mist, and under various forms in the clearest day. The first is a silly, and the last a knavish attempt. I said just now, that it was a kind of forgery. I do not recall my words, but add, that in the case here supposed the Chinese are much more excusable than the Christians; for if the Chinese have forged different words of Fohi, Christians have forged different words of God.

How can we lay less than this to their charge, when we consider in how many different, remote, and inconsistent senses, such as destroy one another, and such as are advanced on no autho-

rity but that of their own imaginations, they interpret the same passages of Holy Writ? There is, according to these doctors, a grammatical, a literal or historical, an allegorical or figurative, an anagogical or divine, and a tropological or moral sense. Some, or all of these, may be applied to the same sentence, nay to the same word. Light, in that noble passage of the book of Genesis, where it is said, "Let there be light, "and there was light," signifies very plainly, in the grammatical, literal, and only proper sense, the corporal light which God created, and concerning which alone it was at all to the purpose to speak in that place. But divines, by their arbitrary power over their Scriptures, make it to signify the Messiah allegorically, and tropologically or anagogically the inward light of grace, or the outward splendour of celestial glory. Thus again, by virtue of the same power, Jerusalem, which is the name of a town, has been made to signify the vision of peace, the church militant, the church triumphant, and the soul of a believer*. The sense of no writings, neither sacred nor profane, can be ever fixed, if they remain subject to such licentious interpretations. These interpretations have served, and they could be intended to serve, by the Jews who set, and by the Christians who followed the example, no other purpose, than that of furnishing the rabbins of both religions with means of giving a colour of

* See Calmet.

divine

divine authority to all their own inventions. The absurdities which the former have advanced on such interpretations, seconded by those of their oral law and cabbala, and which you may find in our modern writers, that were skilled in rabbinical learning, are innumerable, and pass all measure of probability; so that one cannot help being astonished, when some of our christian divines lament most piously the loss of those rules, according to which the Jews interpreted their Scriptures, as they suppose; for that there were any such stated rules observed is but supposition.

It is more probable, that the Jews did, as the Christians have done; that they followed their several imaginations, or their several theological and even secular interests. This was the case among Jews and Christians both, and if it may be said, which is not very clear however, that the latter have not fallen generally into so many puerilities and palpable errours as the others, the most unreasoning, the most ignorant, and the most absurd of men, yet they have rendered theology more voluminous, and, with respect to the divine nature and œconomy, more contentious than it was before. St. Austin seems to aim at a sort of composition about the interpretation of the Scriptures, in a letter to Marcellinus*. He says, that "how good soever any reason may appear, it is false and deceitful if it contradicts

* Ep. 143.

"them:

" them; and that how clearly soever we may think " any thing deduced from them, if the thing be " manifestly against reason, we are deceived; it " is not the true sense of the passages alleged; " truth and they cannot stand in opposition." We may observe in this place, what is to be observed often in the writings of this saint, a gingle of words, that pretends to strength and precision, and has neither really.

The first proposition supposes a case, that can never happen among reasonable men, who have received the christian revelation for genuine, after a sufficient examination of the external and internal proofs. Such men, having found nothing that makes it inconsistent with itself, nor that is repugnant to any of those divine truths which reason and the works of God demonstrate to them, will never set up reason in contradiction to it, on account of things plainly taught, but incomprehensible as to their manner of being. If they did, their reason would be false and deceitful; they would cease to be reasonable men: and St. Austin says nothing to the purpose, if he confounds these things with such as imply contradiction, and means an opposition of reason to the former only. But if we could suppose, or if St. Austin could mean to suppose, that they who followed the rule he lays down in another place, the rule of believing first, in hopes of understanding afterward, should discover things, when they came to examine in order to understand, that implied contradiction, his conclusion would

would be false. They would be obliged in this case to reject the revelation, not their reason; or to fall at once into a general and particular absurdity. The general absurdity of renouncing the faculties God had given them of distinguishing truth from falshood, good from evil; and the particular absurdity of renouncing, in favour of the internal, that very rule by which they had judged in favour of the external proofs of this revelation.

The second proposition admits and encourages the very practice we censure so justly, for which the saint was so famous, and by which he contributed so much to promote contentions in his own days, and to perpetuate them to ours. The practice of deducing doctrines from the Scriptures that are not evidently contained in them, for if they were evidently contained in them, they could not be said to be deduced from them, is admitted. It is admitted, that these deductions may be manifestly against reason. Several such there were, and among them some of his own. Reason is made the judge of doctrines thus deduced; but when reason condemns any, divines, the inventors or fautors of them, are at liberty to evade the objections they cannot answer, by interpretations of the same passages in some other and new sense. Who does not see, that the direct tendency of this practice is exactly the same as the event has proved it to be? It composes and propagates a religion, seemingly under the authority of God, but really under that of man. The principles

principles of revelation are lost in theology, or disfigured by it: and while some men are impudent enough to pretend, others are silly enough to believe, that they adhere to the Gospel, and maintain the cause of God against infidels and hereticks, when they do nothing better, nor more than espouse the conceits of men, whom enthusiasm, or the ambition of forming sects, or of making a great figure in them, has inspired. If you ask now what the practice of the christian fathers, and of other divines, should have been, in order to preserve the purity of faith, and to promote peace and charity, the answer is obvious, and so evidently agreeable to right reason, that the modestest man alive might make it before an œcumenical council without blushing. They should have adhered to the Word of God; they should have paid no regard to heathen philosophy, Jewish cabbala, the sallies of enthusiasm, or the refinements of human ingenuity. They should have embraced and held fast the articles of faith and doctrine, that were delivered in plain terms, or in unequivocal figures; they should not have been dogmatical, where the sense was doubtful, nor have presumed even to guess, where the Holy Ghost left the veil of mystery undrawn. If the council should decree, that this answer was erroneous, and that the system of christianity would have been incomplete and insufficient without these adventitious helps, let us make no scruple of saying, that the council would decree blasphemously, as more councils than one have done,

done, since they would decree, that Infinite Wisdom had not proportioned means to ends, or that the ends of Infinite Wisdom were more or other than the Gospel of Christ assigns.

SECT. XVIII.

THE uncertainty of that precarious tradition, whose authority has been so magnified, may be set down as a third cause of the multiplication of doctrines and sects in the christian church. The truth of facts, however notorious, and even of those that men have the least interest or temptation to falsify, is trusted very unsafely to tradition. How much more unsafe must this conveyance be, when it is that of opinions and doctrines, intricate, and therefore easily mistaken, disputed or disputable, and therefore industriously misrepresented? Barrow, in his Exposition on the Creed, takes away this great foundation of theology; for though he asserts, that there are proper and sufficient means to discern the genuine doctrines and dictates of christianity, yet he leaves us in effect none but the writings of the evangelists, and the Epistles of two or three apostles who had been disciples. According to him and to right reason, the first and best way of preserving doctrines is to preserve them in the writings of the authors of them; though even this cannot be deemed absolutely secure. It is far from being certain, that genuine peripatetism is every

every where plainly read in the writings of Aristotle, as they are come down to us: and if Pythagoras and Socrates had writ, or if the works of Zeno were extant, we should be best assured, better than any other way, what their philosophies were, but still not without some possibility of errour. Another way of preserving doctrines is to preserve them in the writings of disciples, that immediately received them from the authors. Thus the writings of Plato and Xenophon tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what Socrates taught: and yet these writings give very different and contradictory accounts of the Socratick philosophy. The next way that Barrow mentions is the preservation of doctrines in the writings of those who writ at larger distances of time, as those of the Stoicks were preserved in the writings of Cicero, Seneca, and Epictetus. This way he allows to be more imperfect than the former, because every writer is apt to misapprehend and misrepresent — to do somewhat more than transcribe—to comment and descant—to adorn and set out, to confirm or confute the doctrine they relate, in order thereto representing it with advantage to their purpose. The last way is that of oral tradition, the most liable to defect and corruption of any, according to this judicious expositor. Men do as before, and in this case with greater advantage, "accommodate doctrines to their own prejudices, inclinations, and designs. The farther such tradition departs from the original spring, the

" more subject it is to contract such alterations " and impurities. Every doctrine, thus propa- " gated, is like a stream at the head, small and " narrow, but clear and pure. Proceeding on, " it grows larger and fouler. So tradition swells, " by taking in what oblique channels of private " fancy and pragmatical invention discharge into " it, and by receiving tincture from particular in- " clination or politick design it grows muddy and " feculent."

The genuine doctrines and dictates of christianity have not been conveyed to us by the first of these four ways; for the Saviour published his Gospel by preaching, and by occasional discourses, and not by writing. But they have been preserved by the second; for two of the four evangelists had been disciples from the first, and witnesses, not only of all that had passed during his mission, but of his resurrection. They had, therefore, received immediately from the author the doctrines they published in his name. Who the other two were, it is impossible to say with sufficient assurance, amidst the fabulous or little authentick reports of ecclesiastical writers. But if Mark was the convert, the scholar, and the amanuensis of Peter, his testimony comes nearer to that required under this head, since Peter was a disciple, one of the twelve, than the testimony of Luke, who belonged in all these relations to Paul; since Paul was no disciple, neither one of the twelve, nor one of the seventy, if, in truth, there was any such seventy, had received nothing immediately

immediately from Christ, nor had any apostolical commission, except that which he assumes in the Acts of the apostles written by Luke, and dictated, probably, by himself. I say probably, because it is possible Luke might have been an eye and ear-witness of part of all he relates in the Acts, as St. Jerom observes; though he could be no more than a hearsay witness of what he relates in the Gospel, since he owns, in the beginning of it, that he writ, like many others, what he had been told.

When divines urge, on this occasion, that the differences between Matthew and Mark, as well as others, are accounted for, and an intire harmony of the Gospels is established, by criticks, so that they all confirm one another, infidels, I know will cavil, and sometimes plausibly, against many things that must be assumed to make this harmony appear, and to reconcile these differences. When it is urged again, that the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and an immediate inspiration being bestowed on all the disciples in an eminent manner and alike, they are all to be esteemed witnesses alike, and they all received the doctrines of christianity immediately from God, the author of it, though not by the mouth of the Saviour while he was in the flesh, I know too, that the same men will not remain without a reply. For instance, they will insist that all this, if allowed, will prove nothing in favour of Mark, nor Luke, nor even Paul himself, who were neither of the twelve nor of the seventy; after which they will add, perhaps "ex abundantia," that none

none of these three having been designed by God to stand in the place of that disciple who had betrayed Jesus, and to fill up the number of the apostles, Matthias alone, with the eleven, could pass in any sense for one of those disciples who had received the doctrines of christianity immediately from the author of them; though the seventy might be, as it is said they were, appointed to be witnesses of the resurrection. Erasmus, in the first chapter of his paraphrase on the Acts, makes Christ say to all the disciples, that the Holy Spirit, which he had breathed upon them, and which he promised should descend upon them from above, would not only recal to their minds all he had taught them, but suggest likewise to them whatever else it might become necessary for them to know. But the cavillers, of whom we speak, will urge, that these words were added by Erasmus for reasons very obvious, and are not contained in the text; nor is even the sense of them implied so far as to authorise the disciples, and much less any that were not of their number, to add any thing to the conditions of salvation, that Christ himself had imposed. Such cavils will be raised, I say; but they will deserve to have little weight, as long as it is out of dispute, that we have in our hands the Gospels of Matthew and John *, who give themselves to us for eye-witnesses of all that Christ did, and of

* N. B. I speak of both alike, though I am not ignorant of what has been said, that might weaken the authority of Matthew's Gospel.

all that happened to him, and ear-witnesses at the same time of all the doctrines he taught. Two channels were as sufficient as four to convey these doctrines to the world, and to preserve them in their original purity. The manner too, in which these evangelists recorded them, was much better adapted to this purpose, than that of Plato, or even of Xenophon, to preserve the doctrines of Socrates. The evangelists did not content themselves to give a general account of the doctrines of Christ in their own words, nor presume, in feigned dialogues, to make him deliver their opinions in his own name, and as his own doctrines. They recorded his doctrines particularly, they recorded them in the very words in which he taught them, and they were careful to mention the several occasions on which he delivered them to his disciples or others. If therefore Plato and Xenophon tell us, with a good degree of certainty, what Socrates taught, the two evangelists seem to tell us, with much more, what the Saviour taught, and commanded them to teach. In a word, we may say, on these grounds, that the genuine doctrines of christianity have been preserved much better than those of heathen philosophy, in the second way of preserving doctrines, though they have not been preserved in the first and best, as some of the others have been.

The third and fourth ways of preserving doctrines, which Barrow mentions, have so near a relation, that they may be thrown into one. They who decide about doctrines, or who write about them,

them, at great distances of time from the first disciples, are more easily imposed upon by traditions, and can more easily impose them on others. Both these things fell out, and no case can be well supposed wherein the truth of fact, or the purity of doctrine, was so liable to be corrupted, or was in fact so much, or so soon corrupted, as in the propagation of christianity. The mixed crowd of Jews and heathens that embraced it, and the very manner of propagating it, rendered this corruption unavoidable.

The Jews had begun long before this time to corrupt their own religion. They had borrowed many superstitious opinions from Egypt, and the eastern nations; and Pythagorean and Platonick metaphysicks, which they had entertained after they became acquainted with the Greeks, and lived under the domination of the Seleucides and the Ptolemies, were imported both by them and the heathen converts into christianity; by the Hellenist Jews more than by those of Palestine, and by the heathen more than by either. Christianity began in Judæa; it derived it's authority and it's proofs from the Jewish Scriptures, the authenticity and divinity of which it every where supposes. The author of it was a Jew; and, as the religion he instituted tended not directly to destroy Judaism, so the christian church at Jerusalem conformed long, as Christ himself had done constantly, to the ancient religion. On all these accounts, the Jewish converts might regard christianity as a branch of Judaism, and take the

same liberties of retrenching, of adding, of altering, with one, as had been taken with the other. They had acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah foretold by their prophets. In this they had gone beyond the Pharisees, who rejected him, as the Pharisees had gone, in receiving all the books of the Old Testament, beyond the Saducees, who received the Pentateuch, and rejected all the others. The Pharisees had added an oral to the written law. They believed the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, future rewards and punishments, the metempsychosis, and other doctrines utterly unknown to Moses, which they accommodated somehow or other to his law. They made up a new system of theology, by such accommodations of the law to their traditions and their philosophy. Why should not the christian Jews we speak of make up a new system likewise, by blending all these and christianity together, as they could best reconcile them? The example of Philo, who did not profess christianity indeed, but who found means to make the Platonick opinions of the deity, and those of Moses agree, might encourage them in the attempt.

Much in the same manner the Pagan converts might, and certainly did proceed. They found a great analogy between the most sublime and important doctrines of christianity, and those which some of their philosophers had taught, and they might easily be led from hence to think, that a sameness of doctrine denoted a sameness of authority. This will appear the more probable, if we con-

sider, that not only some hereticks, but several of the most orthodox fathers, believed all those to be illuminated from above, who purified their minds, separated their souls as much as possible from their bodies, and died this philosophical death in order to arrive at a philosophical regeneration, according to the notions that metaphysical enthusiasm had established*. Thus, Justin the martyr makes Christ to have been known, in some sort, to Socrates†. It could not be otherwise. The soul of Socrates was a purified soul, and Christ the illuminating Word. St. Austin was much of the same mind, and says little less than Justin of this philosopher.

The eclectic sect, which Potamo founded about this time at Alexandria, might give farther occasion to the heathen converts to corrupt christianity. This sect professed a detachment from all sects, in the search of truth: they were

"Nullius addicti jurare in verba magistri."

They delivered themselves from the chains of philosophical bigotry. They might hold some to one and some to another system of philosophy in the main, as their different judgments or prejudices inclined them; but they asserted the reasonable liberty of embracing truth wherever they found it, and without any regard to the tenets even of that sect towards which they leaned the oftenest and

* Plato, Plut. Jamb. et alibi. — liberatio à corpore celebratissima mors est philosophica.

† Apol. 1.

the most. Sotion passed for a Stoick, and his scholar Seneca professed himself such*. Yet Sotion was fond of Pythagorean doctrines, and Seneca † made no scruple of borrowing from Epicurus. Plotinus was a Platonician, and yet he adopted doctrines, such, we may presume, especially as were subtile and mysterious, both from the Stoicks and the Peripateticks. Clement ‡ was a Christian, who taught christianity by his publick lessons at Alexandria, and who defended it by his writings, and yet he approved this manner of philosophising; we may conclude too, that it was the method of that school. Ammonius was the preceptor of Plotinus and of Origen. Plotinus deserted christianity, and bred up an inveterate enemy to it in Porphyry; or if he continued a Christian to the last, as Eusebius says somewhere that he did, for no better reason, perhaps, than to keep a name of so great renown in the christian catalogue, he dressed up his christian with so much pagan theology, that he might pass for a professor of either. Origen, on the other hand, who had heard Clement, as well as Ammonius, was such a zealous Christian, that he aspired to suffer martyrdom, like his father, and did actually execute one sort, that of castration, on himself; by which however he avoided another, that of temptation. Origen signalized himself in the eclectick method. His warm imagination carried him into allegorical and cabalisti-

* Senec. Ep. 58. † Senec. passim. ‡ Strom. l. 1.

cal

cal interpretations of the Scriptures, and his immense reading furnished him with a multitude of notions borrowed from pagan theology. Many of these he introduced into christianity: and his book of principles was a repertory of the most extravagant opinions. Heretical too they were declared, by men less learned, less zealous, perhaps, but certainly more politick, and more circumspect in observing the course that orthodoxy took, than himself.

From what has been said it is evident, that such a motley crowd of Jews and Heathens, as the first converts to christianity were, could not fail to mix a leaven of Judaick and heathen theology into the christian system, and thereby to swell, to perplex, and ferment it. Had they kept close to what the Saviour taught, all this had been avoided: and supposing christianity to have been purely a human invention, it had been the most amiable and the most useful invention, that was ever imposed on mankind for their good. But the extensions of it, and the ingraftments that were made on this divine stock, by mere human philosophy, and by religious prejudices already entertained, produced a system, or rather caused divers systems to grow up, of fantastical theology. Christianity, as it came out of the hands of God, if I may use the expression, was a most simple and intelligible rule of belief, worship and manners; which is the true notion of a religion. As soon as men presumed to add any thing of their own to it, the human alloy corrupted the divine mass, and

it became an object of vain, intricate, and contentious science. Such it continued to be: and the very manner in which truth was propagated served to establish errour.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the facts that proved the divinity of it, were published by discourse, not by writing. Christ preached; he was the greatest of preachers, and he sent his disciples out to preach*. They pursued their mission through different countries; and as fast as they formed a church in one, they hastened to another. At least, this was the practice of St. Paul, who scattered about more spiritual seed than all the rest, and more widely. Peter was a very itinerant missionary too, if we give credit to Eusebius, which I do very seldom. This writer makes him travel over a great part of Asia Minor, and even to the people of Pontus; because he speaks of these nations, though not of his preaching to them, in his first Epistle. It is much more likely, that he continued in Palestine and the neighbourhood, and that, perhaps, he never went even to Rome, whither you pretended catholicks send him, that you may impose, as you have done without proof, and against common sense, the ecclesiastical tyranny of the bishops of that see, his supposed successors, on the christian world. Paul indeed, was a great traveller, as I have said, moving about from place to place, almost conti-

* Summus ille Ecclesiastes.——Verbum et sermo Dei. Eras. de Rat. Concion.

nually,

nually, during the greatest part of the time that passed between his baptism and his death; that is, according to the calculation of Erasmus, thirty-five years. He went over the countries where Peter taught more than once. He had been in Arabia before. He visited Greece, and most of the islands. He penetrated beyond Thracia and Macedonia into Illyria. He returned into Palestine, and was sent in chains from thence to Rome.

How these two apostles preached, for of the rest we have no need to speak, and should have little to say, may be seen by their publick discourses recorded in the Acts, and might be guessed by the style and matter of their Epistles. To show how they succeeded in their missions, one example will be sufficient. Paul had preached eighteen months or two years at Corinth, and had settled a church there. The Corinthians did not renounce christianity as soon as he had left them; but they corrupted it both in opinion and practice, and fell back into all their former habits of vice and debauchery. It was on this occasion, that the apostle writ his two Epistles to the Corinthians; and in them we see the particular errours and abuses, that were grown in a short time to a great head in that city. Among these it is our present purpose to mention some. The taint of heathen philosophy remained upon them; and they had contracted a gnostical contempt for the simplicity of the Gospel, and of evangelical teachers. False apostles from Judæa had

had introduced superstitious opinions and practices, and had persuaded them to regard the law of Moses, as necessary to be observed with that of Christ. They were divided into sects, and affected preeminence according to the dignity they ascribed to those by whom they had been baptised, to Apollos, to Cephas, to Paul. For these, and for many other things, they are severely reproved in the first of the two Epistles I have mentioned: and though St. Paul seems satisfied, in the second, with their submission and amendment, yet it is certain, that the same errours and abuses continued or revived in the church of Corinth, and in others. Jerom says *, in general, that even in his time the remains of them appeared in Achaia; and St. Austin †, taking notice in particular of the superstitious washings of the feet, laments, that the church of Christ was subjected to more than Judaical servitude, under the load of external observances.

It was easy to intermix, in this manner of promulgating the Gospel, as many philosophical and pharisaical conceits, as the prejudices or purposes of the several preachers of it required: and when they were once well mingled together, as tradition varied those of one sort, or multiplied those of another, publick writings and ecclesiastical authority were added, to increase and perpetuate the confusion in which christianity was delivered

* Præfat 2di Lib. Com. in Ep. ad Galatas.

† Ep. ad Januarium.

down

down to posterity, and in which it continues even at this day. A state not to be quite parallelled by that of any other religion, as I believe; neither by the Mahometan, however divided, nor by that of Foe, into how many sects soever it has been broken among the eastern nations. But we must not imagine, that the diversity of sects, and the opposition of and confusion of doctrines, which were principal, were sole causes of the uncertainty of the traditions of the primitive church, or were caused solely by the manner of promulgating christianity. Other causes of this division and confusion existed and concurred, either mediately through them, or by their own immediate effects, to corrupt tradition, and hinder the christian system from acquiring any appearance of consistency.

SECT. XIX.

To collect instances of all the extravagancies which were broached at that time, which almost choked the tender shoots of christianity, and which grew up with them, like weeds among the corn, would be endless and needless both. I will recal one alone of the enthusiasm that prevailed, and of the impudence with which some men imposed on the simplicity of others. We find it in Paul's second Epistle to the Corinthians. The effect of his first, whatever that was, encouraged him to write in this more plainly and

and more bitterly against the false teachers, and more highly in praise of himself, his authority, and his merit, which he scruples not to prefer to that of all the other apostles. On this occasion, it appears, that the false teachers had the front to assure, and to make the first christian converts believe, that they had an immediate communication with celestial beings. This gave them an air of superiority, to which St. Paul thought it not proper to submit, as indeed it was not, since that would have been to submit his authority to theirs, and the Gospel he taught to the gospels they taught. The least he could do, and it is observable, that his modesty would allow him to do no more, was to oppose his own raptures and visions to those which these men pretended to have, and to declare, that he too had been rapped up into the third Heaven, either in body or spirit, where he had learned things incomprehensible and ineffable.

What has been said very summarily may serve, however, to show, that it was not possible traditions, derived from the first and through the most early ages of Christianity, should convey either facts or doctrines down with a due authenticity and precision, unless a continued miracle had subsisted to alter the nature of things, and to produce effects repugnant to their causes. But there remain some circumstances still, which deserve to be mentioned. It has been observed already, that the fondness of the first Christians for pagan theology carried them,

not

not only to borrow from it, but to forge books under the names of such as had been famous divines in the East, in Egypt, and elsewhere. Even this did not content them. They not only introduced, with equal absurdity and falsehood, these authorities, to confirm the most sublime mysteries of christianity, and to teach men the way to salvation *, but they composed a multitude of different gospels, not less, I believe, than forty, to give the authority of a divine original to all the fabulous traditions, superstitious practices, and extravagant doctrines, which were adopted, or invented by the different sects. Thus, the Gnosticks had their gospel; the Marcionites had theirs; the Valentinians had theirs, and even Judas Iscariot had his †. Apocalypses, or books of revelations, were not so numerous; but of these too there were several. One of these particularly, the Apocalypse of St. Paul, I could almost wish that we had, since it pretended to relate the ineffable things he saw in the third Heaven. But it is lost as well as others: and if that which we have under the name of St. John had been lost likewise, there might have been some madmen the fewer, and christianity would not have suffered so much.

There was another practice in the primitive church, which may find it's place properly enough here, because it served to corrupt the traditions

* Via ad salutem——indicata.

† Cod. Apoc. Nov. Testam. of Fabricius.

of

of the church, and to fill the ecclesiastical annals with lying legends; though it did not corrupt the doctrines of christianity so directly as the others. The practice I mean is, that of writing pious romances, under the pretence of writing the lives of saints, and the deaths of martyrs. This practice grew so frequent, and those romances were held in such esteem, that a certain ecclesiastick of the Greek church, one Metaphrastus*, I think, published a treatise of criticism on the subject, and laid down rules for the composition of them. Christian historians, like those of Greece, who wrote after the expedition of Alexander, imagined they could never add too much of the marvellous events. Their readers seemed to be of the same mind: and history became romance in order to please. These histories too of saints and martyrs were panegyricks as well as romances, and had the same effect, that Tully ascribes somewhere to the funeral orations of the Romans, which corrupted tradition first, and history afterward. Well might they have this effect, when they were authorised by the greatest and most admired fathers of the church; when such a man as St. Austin, for instance, read such legends in the pulpit to his congregation, and kept and published accounts of miracles wrought by the relicks of saints and martyrs. Since the preachers propagated these idle tales, it is not wonderful that the hearers believed them, and that pious ly-

* Vid. Bailett's Pref. to the Lives of the Saints.

ing

ing became the voice of tradition, in ages when any thing might be imposed on christian auditories, and that which was least understood was most admired in them, according to the character given of these flocks by St. Gregory of Nazianzen, in a very remarkable anecdote related by St. Jerom*. But these romances had an effect still worse; for they introduced into christianity a sort of polytheism and idolatry, too nearly akin to heathenism. Let not your zeal for the honour of saints, martyrs, and confessors, make you think the expression too hard. I can quote you one much more hard from Erasmus, for whom you profess the same veneration that I have. In the Preface to De Marca, before his Paraphrase on St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians, after saying, that "this apostle did not suffer any mortal to be "cried or preached up, nor the praise of the "Gospel to be transferred to men," he adds, "nunc quidem, velut antiquato Christo, novum "idolatriæ genus invehunt, ex hominibus, ut ita "loquar, deos facientes." The church, your church I mean, has ascribed divinity, little, if at all better than the heathen did. Some of your saints, though they were not publick debauchees, were very ill men: and if you consult Cyprian, whose authority is so much respected, and for the same reason, by the christian clergy of every sect, you will find, that they who suffered as confessors were very often men of the most profligate mo-

* Ep. ad Nepotian.

rals.

rals. If they were such after their sufferings, there is room to believe, that some of the martyrs were such before they suffered, and when they suffered.

No monuments can be more uncertain, none more precarious, than those of christian tradition. Other traditions grow more and more so by time. These were never more so than at first. Ask your acquaintance doctor Waterland, whether he has found the tradition of the three first ages of the church direct, clear, and uniform in support of the consubstantiality of the Son to the Father, which is a doctrine that he defends most strenuously. He will assure you, that he has found it to be so. He will not be able, however, to prove it any more than bishop Bull has done, after all his boasts of the unanimity of the fathers, and even with the help of forced constructions, and indirect proofs. As little will he or any other divine be able to defend, on this authority, several doctrines, that they hold, or to justify themselves for not holding several that they reject. Even your divines, who lay so much stress on tradition, are pleased to abandon it, as well as ours, in cases wherein it seems to carry the greatest authority, because it is immediately derived from the apostles. Thus, I believe, that abstinence from blood, which was enjoined as much as abstinence from fornication by the apostles in a solemn council, is at this time required by no doctor, except doctor Delany. Thus again, there are, I suppose, very few millenarians left, if even

Mr.

Mr. Whiston be still of the same opinion, though the year one thousand seven hundred and twenty is past, and the millennium not begun. In short, by partial traditions they can prove or disprove any thing. By universal traditions almost nothing. This very doctrine of a millennium was opposed at the close of the second century*: and a certain priest, one Caius, who believed, that the Apocalypse ascribed to St. John was writ by Cerinthus, ascribed this opinion not to the evangelist, but to the heretick. Jerom, Austin, Gregory the great, or the saint as he is called with less reason, and divines much more modern than these, have interpreted the passages of the Apocalypse, that establish the millennium, in another sense: and a man, who should profess to expect it at this day, or to believe the doctrine, would be treated as a visionary. But yet we must, I think, receive this tradition, so generally rejected; or reject all traditions, even those as generally received.

Let me say something more, which occurs to me on the subject of the millennium. Irenæus is a father much quoted and much respected. Irenæus had seen Papias and Polycarp, and was himself a disciple of the disciples of St. John. All these were millenarians: and thus the first authors of apostolical traditions taught this doctrine as apostolical. Justin the martyr, and Tertullian, were millenarians likewise. Justin was

* Euseb. Hist. Eccles. lib. 3.

the first father, I believe, who took notice of the Apocalypse, ascribed it to St. John, and founded his belief of the millennium upon it, in the dialogue with Tryphon. Tertullian goes farther. He maintains the Apocalypse against the Marcionites, and affirms, that the new Jerusalem, to be built by the hand of God, and to descend from Heaven, was known to Ezekiel, and had been seen by the apostle St. John; nay, that the plan, or model of it, had been seen in his time suspended in the air forty days together, that it might be known again, when it should actually exist on the Earth. Let it not be said, that I insist on the authorities of a weak man, and of a madman. I might do so, in this case, with as good reason as divines have for insisting on them in so many others. But the point I insist upon is this. The doctrine of the millennium was an apostolical doctrine, and taught as such by the immediate successors of the apostles. It was opposed, indeed, near two centuries afterward by an obscure priest, who denied it to be the doctrine of St. John, because he denied St. John to be the author of the Apocalypse. But the doctrine was founded on original tradition, as well as on the Apocalypse: and therefore, whatever interpretations were made of these revelations in after times, the tradition was too fresh to be shaken. What shall we say now? Were the traditions concerning the millennium of doubtful authority in the first ages of the church? In that case, tradition

tion is no rule at all. Were they uniform? How comes this doctrine to be exploded?

The third and fourth ways, that is, the two worst, of preserving doctrines, which Barrow mentions, have so near a relation to one another, that one is the necessary consequence of the other. They who decide about disputable and disputed facts or doctrines, at great distances of time, may be easily imposed upon by tradition, and may easily impose by authority. Tradition is all that time growing corrupt. If it become false, they decide and they write falsely; if uncertain, uncertainly. The Nicæan council decided against Arius: and yet, if we give credit to Petavius, whom it was more easy to silence by authority, than to refute by fact and by reason, the fathers of the three first centuries were little better than Arians. How came the fathers of the fourth to decree so positively and so precisely in favour of a consubstantiality, about which the tradition had been neither positive, precise, nor unanimous; though bishop Bull has ventured to assert, that the antenicæan fathers had agreed on this subject, "ad unum." Could any man, who had not the front of a controversial writer, affirm in this manner, when he knew, as Bull knew, that eighty fathers, who condemned Paul of Samosata, denied the homoüsion, or consubstantiality of the Son with the Father?

Will it be urged, that the four Gospels are as old, and even older than tradition; that the orthodox doctrine concerning the Trinity is esta-

blished in them, and in the other Scriptures of the New Testament, by all which tradition is to be controlled and corrected? I apprehend, that the answer will not be sufficient. Some will assert, that the Scriptures, far from establishing the Nicæan doctrine, vindicate, by their whole tenour, the supremacy of the Father, and declare the subordination of the Son. But let it be, that the Gospels received into the canon are favourable to the orthodox belief; how do we know, that the other Gospels were exactly conformable to these, on a matter of so much nice definition? Might not our learned and subtile theology find the task infinitely harder, if we had those Gospels, to create a harmony between three or four dozen, than between four? The council of Laödicea admitted four, and rejected all the rest. But it is very possible, that this council might proceed, as councils have generally done, under the influence of an ecclesiastical faction, and decree accordingly; or else on some such reasons as Irenæus called a demonstration*. There are four parts of the world. There are four cardinal winds. There have been four covenants, under Adam, Noah, Moses, and Christ. There can be but four Gospels therefore. I omit some other proofs, just as demonstrative as those, upon all which he did, and the council might determine, that there could be neither more nor less than four Gospels;

* Lib. 3.

though

though several traditions authorised several others.

The truth is, that as every man, in the most early days of christianity, judged of his own inspiration, and of the gifts of the Spirit he received, so every church judged of the inspiration of authors, and of the divine authority of books. The first led to the last, and those authors were deemed inspired, and those books were canonised, in which every particular church found the greatest conformity with her own sentiments. It is astonishing to consider how far this extravagance was carried. To consider, for instance, that Clement of Alexandria should look on an Apocalypse of Peter as genuine, and it should be rejected afterward. That St. Paul should insert in his Epistles several passages of the Apocalypse of Elias, as Origen assures that he did, and it should be refused admittance into the canon. But it is still more astonishing to observe, how much respect Origen himself had for the visions of Hermas, and the oracles of the Sybil, as well as others of the fathers. Irenæus, having cited the former, uses this expression, "scriptura pronunciavit*: and honest Justin, in his admonition to the Greeks, exhorts them in the most solemn manner, to believe the ancient and venerable Sybil, who was extraordinarily inspired by Almighty God.

I conclude from the little that has been said on

* Lib. 4.

a most voluminous subject, that as tradition furnishes very precarious anecdotes to those who write at great distances of time, so it may become difficult, nay, impossible, to ascertain the authority even of books that were written, perhaps, at the time they suppose themselves to have been written, if the attempt to fix their authenticity, and to reduce them into a canon, is made at a great distance of time. They may be neither received nor rejected on grounds absolutely sure. They may be rejected at one time, and received at another: a remarkable example of which we find in the adventures of the Apocalypse. Whether this book was writ by John the Evangelist, John the priest, Cerinthus, or some other visionary, it passed for a composition of the Evangelist's, and maintained great credit as such in the church for some centuries before the council of Laödicea. This council left it out of the canon in the year three hundred and sixty: and although Asiatick bishops might pass, in this case, for judges more competent than those of the West, the council of Carthage put it into the canon in the year three hundred and ninety seven. Some Spanish councils, and others, I believe, in the West did the same. Anathema, that convincing argument, was employed against all gainsayers: and as the mist thickened, it was universally admitted into the canon of the New Testament.

To sum up the whole in one short proposition. Ecclesiastical tradition has been, from the first

first and purest ages, founded, for the most part, in ignorance, superstition, enthusiasm, and fraud. He who pretends to clear the reverend fathers, by whom tradition was principally conveyed down from age to age, and to deny this charge, must be very ignorant himself, or very impudent. Sometimes they show their learning, like Justin, who took the inscription "Semoni Deo sancto," on the statue of a god of the Sabines, for an inscription on the statue of Simon the magician. Sometimes their logick, and the strength of their reasoning talents are extremely like to those of Irenæus, in his famous demonstration of the necessity of four Gospels. Sometimes they are as sober as Cyprian, who rehearsed to his church in the morning the visions and dreams he had in the night, and who consulted little children in their extasies, when he had none of these himself*. Sometimes

* As extraordinary as this may seem, it will not surprise those who have read the Confession ascribed to him, and published among his works in the Benedictine edition of them. The great St. Cyprian, for so our divines, as well as yours, affect to call him, had been a rhetorician before his conversion, and was after it an admirer of his countryman, Tertullian, whom he called his master, and some portion of whose works he used to read every day, according to an anecdote mentioned by St. Jerom[a]. Now since he formed his style on this model, and on the taste of his age, we may well expect to find what is found in his writings, much hyperbole, much spiritual bombast, and all the flowers of false eloquence. We find them very eminently in that extraordinary piece, his Confessi

[a] Lib. de Scrip. Ecclesiast.

Sometimes they are as sagacious as Ambrose, who had visions and dreams too, and who had beside them

fession. There he gives an account of his education, of his admission into all the secrets of the blackest and most diabolical magick. Believe me, says the saint, I saw the devil himself; believe me, I embraced him, I conversed with him, and was esteemed one of those who held a principal rank about him. He adds, that the devil made him many compliments and promises, gave him a band of infernal spirits to command, and at the end of this first visit arose from his throne, and accompanied the young Jambres with a politeness, that surprised all those who saw it. He describes his person, his dress, and the spirits that attended his court in material forms, with which they were supplied by the steams of sacrifices. He describes afterward the wonderful feats he performed, while he was a magician, and all the abominations of which he was guilty. But finding at last, that the devil, and all the powers of Hell had not been able to debauch Justina, a christian virgin, for whom his friend Aglaidas had a strong inclination, and whom Cyprian himself seems to have liked very much, he renounced the devil and all his works. He set him even at defiance, You tremble, said the saint, at the name of Christ; the sign of his cross deprives you of all power: how would you stand his presence? Thus the devil was put to confusion. But Cyprian fell into despair, till his friend Eusebius comforted him, carried him to the bishop, and made him not only a Christian, but one of the greatest lights of the church.

Some divines would find, in all this, no reason to object to Cyprian's authority. On the contrary, they would exalt this confession, and the publick shame which the penitent took to himself, as an illustrious proof of the sincerity of his conversion. Such divines might, perhaps, go farther, and show, by way of corollary, not only against the Novatians, that christians who had apostised might be received to repentance, but also, that the most wicked of Pagans might become a saint. They would not, however, be able to solve this dilemma.

" Either

them the faculty of distinguishing the relicks of saints and martyrs, by certain emotions that they caused

" Either Cyprian believed what he reported to be true, or he " knew it to be false. If he believed it true, he was a mad- " man. If he knew it to be false, he was a liar; and neither " in one character, nor in the other, a fit pastor for the flock " of Christ."

Other divines, both of your church, and of mine, are very unwilling to own, that this confession is Cyprian's. They would gladly father it on some other person, no matter on whom. His writings do not only give, like those of the other fathers, a seeming authority to many of the doctrines that they teach; but he was in particular a zealous assertor of the dignity and power of bishops, and of the whole ecclesiastical order. The papists, indeed, have most use for this father; and his book " de Unitate Ecclesiæ" alone, nay, one single passage of it would suffice to make him a favourite in the church of Rome. The passage I mean is that wherein, after he has quoted the words of Christ to Peter[a], though he acknowledges that all the apostles received the same powers, he adds[b], " tamen ut unita- " tem manifestaret, unitatis ejusdem originem ab uno incipi- " entem suâ authoritate disposuit——sed exordium ab unitate " proficiscitur, et primatus Petro datur, ut una Christi ec- " clesia, et cathedra una monstretur." The reputation of such a witness in favour of papal primacy, and episcopal authority, in the middle of the third century, is to be supported at any rate; and by consequence this piece is not to be ascribed to him, if the priesthood can hinder it, by opposing the most improbable to the most probable reasons.

We know nothing of the man till he became a Christian. St. Austin indeed speaks of him[c], as if he had read his Confession. " Mutatus est Cyprianus," says this saint, of his countryman, " cujus hodie memoriam frequentamus—ipse scribit, " ipse testatur cujus vitæ fuerit aliquando, quam nefariæ, " quam

[a] Mat. c. xvi. [b] John, c. xx. [c] Serm. 311.

caused in him. Sometimes they are as cautious and exact in their reports of miracles, as Austin was,

" quam impiæ, quam improbandæ, ac detestandæ." The author of the Confession could almost alone deserve such epithets: and it is extremely probable, that Pontius, a prudent deacon, and the ancient biographer of Cyprian, passed over in silence all that preceded his conversion, as if it had been unworthy to be mentioned, but in truth, that he might not be obliged to say any thing of this important Confession. His modern biographer, a Benedictine monk, who published the edition of Cyprian's works, which Baluzius had begun, is not so easily embarrassed. He pretends, that there were two Cyprians, the great St. Cyprian of Carthage, and a little St. Cyprian of Antioch, whose name is likewise preserved in ecclesiastical monuments. He insists on a poem, which Photius reports, that the empress Eudocia wrote about a Cyprian and a Justina who suffered martyrdom in Nicomedia, and which contained many things that are imputed to the Cyprian we speak of by St. Gregory of Nazianzen in his eighteenth sermon, though they could not belong to him. On this foundation the Monk assumes, that St. Gregory confounded the Antiochian with the Carthaginian Cyprian, and did not know on whose festival he preached. Our learned Fell had objected, that no one of this name is to be found among the bishops of Antioch: no wonder, says the learned Benedictine, for as there were two Cyprians, there were two Antiochs, the great Antioch so famous in history, and a little private Antioch concealed in Phœnicia, and scarce heard of in any publick records. It seemed incredible to Fell, that St. Gregory, who had been so well instructed in ecclesiastical affairs by his pious father, and who had been at Nicomedia and in the neighbouring country, should know nothing of this Antiochian Cyprian, but apply the whole of this confession to the Carthaginian. It will avail little, I suppose, to affirm, that Gregory was come newly to Constantinople, and that he preached without sufficient preparation and information: so that I may continue to believe,

was, who says on that important question, whether St. John died or not, "that the people of "Ephesus, men of sense, and not light of belief, "had assured him, that the saint was buried in "their town; but that he lay in his grave like "one who sleeps in his bed, and that the earth "which covered him rose and sunk, as the bed-"clothes do over one who sleeps and breathes." To conclude, they were sometimes as sincere and honest as Jerom. The sincerity of this great doctor may be seen in this instance. He pretended, that angels had scourged him severely for his attachment to profane authors; and to show that he had not dreamed it, he appealed to the marks that remained on his back*. His honesty may be seen in this. The fathers were apt to employ, like rhetors, false reasons and false authorities. Jerom commends the practice, avows it, and gives rules for it. Nay he makes Peter and Paul guilty of it in their famous dispute, which gave occasion to another between him and the bishop of Hippo.

If we were obliged to search for the articles and grounds of faith, and for the measures of obedience, in this mystery of folly and iniquity; if we were to collect our christianity from dark passages of Scripture, that admit often of no sense, and often of several, and that are rendered more

believe, as I do believe, it more probable, that these criticks go about to deceive us, than that St. Gregory was deceived himself, and imposed on his auditory.

* Ep. ad Eustochium.

more uncertain and obscure by ecclesiastical traditions, and by such divines as have been mentioned, our case would be bad indeed. But such an absurdity cannot be in the order of an allwise Providence. God has dealed more graciously with his creatures. The kingdom of theology is the kingdom of darkness: and to enjoy the true light of the Gospel, we must fly from it. To believe, that Jesus was the Messiah, is said by some to be the "unum necessarium" of faith; but to observe the laws of nature is certainly the "unum necessarium" of duty. About this summary of faith and duty there can be no very reasonable doubt. Scripture, tradition, and theology, all conspire to establish them; although the two last endeavour to add to them, and to perplex them,

SECT. XX.

BUT it is time we should proceed to the last cause I assigned of the multiplication of sects, and the confusion of doctrines, which have rendered theology the corruption of religion, and the bane of society, by the abuse which a distinct order of men has made of religion, to acquire dominion over private conscience, and by that spiritual, a great share of temporal dominion, in every christian state. With this I shall conclude all I have to say concerning Authority in Matters of Religion, and shall plead the cause of it, successfully,

cessfully, I hope, against those infidels who charge it unjustly.

That religion is necessary to strengthen, and that it contributes to support government, cannot be denied, I think, without contradicting reason and experience both. This some men have been extravagant enough to do directly: while others, with whom we shall meddle here, have contradicted reason and experience, just as much, in a manner more likely to impose, and therefore more likely to do hurt, by propagating false conceptions of the Supreme Being, by perplexing the notions of religion, and by associating to it such as are really distinct from it. From hence all the evil consequences, that are imputed to religion, have flowed immediately: and it is necessary, therefore, in defence of it, to distinguish clearly between what is really religion, and what has been industriously, and is now habitually confounded with it, and made to pass for it.

Civil obligations are imposed by the laws of man; religious obligations by those of God; and as the authority of the legislator is far greater in one case than in the other, so is the sanction of the law, eternal punishment in another life, instead of temporal pains and penalties in this. If it be said, that beside this difference, we are to consider how much religion has a farther influence than civil government can have, because the former reaches to the inward dispositions of the heart and mind, while the other goes no farther than to regulate outward conduct; I shall neither

neither deny the proposition, nor admit all the use that is made of it: but I shall conclude from thence, how necessary it is to the peace and welfare of mankind, that they be kept from jarring, which cannot be effectually prevented, unless the entire power of both remains in the same hands. As long as natural religion is alone concerned, this should not seem so difficult; but when revealed religions are established, the difficulty becomes almost insuperable. The principles and duties of natural religion arise from the nature of things, and are discovered by the reason of man, according to that order which the author of all nature, and the giver of all reason, has established in the human system. From hence too would arise the institutions of civil government, in a natural state; if the minds of legislators were not corrupted previously by superstition. In these cases, religion and civil government, arising from the same spring, their waters would be intermixed, they would run in one stream, and they might be easily confined to the same channel, if revelation did not introduce mysterious doctrines and rites, which it becomes soon a trade to teach and to celebrate.

Neither nature nor reason could ever lead men to imagine two distinct and independent societies in the same society. This imagination was broached by ecclesiastical ambition; and when it was once broached, it was sure to be propagated by the selfinterest of a whole order of men in every country, and by the superstition

of

of all the rest. A respect for religion begat a respect for this order. The idea of religion came to be associated to that of church, or rather to be confounded with it, and church came to signify this order of men even exclusively. This church, this religious society, grew up in some countries to be the tyrant, in others to be the rival of the state, on the authority of pretended revelations among the heathens; and it is a melancholy truth, that the same monstrous growth has been seen and felt, on the pretended authority of real revelations among Christians. Such is the knavery, and such the folly of mankind, that no example, ancient nor modern, pagan nor christian, can be produced of such an order of men once established, that has not aimed at acquiring from their institution, and that has not acquired, sooner or later, immoderate wealth and exorbitant power.

Few men are so little acquainted with the history of the christian world as not to know, that the wealth of this church is equal, at least in many countries, to that of the Egyptian church; that the influence of the ancient could not be greater than that of the modern Magi over all ranks of men; and that the bishop of Rome has exercised, even over kings in many countries, a power which he claimed in all, of the same nature with that of the Ethiopian church over kings of one country.

A religious society, by which is meaned, on this occasion, a clergy, is, or is not the creature of the state. If the first, it follows, that this

order, no more than others, which the state has instituted for the maintenance of good government, can assume any rights, or exercise any powers, except such as the state has thought fit to attribute to it; and that the state may and ought to keep a constant control over it, not only to prevent usurpations and abuses, but to direct the publick and private influence of the clergy in a strict conformity to the letter and spirit of that constitution, the servants of which in a much truer sense they are, than what they affect sometimes to call themselves, the embassadors of God to other men. If the last is said, if it is asserted, that the church is in any sort independent on the state, there arises from this pretension the greatest absurdity imaginable, that I mean of "imperium in imperio:" an empire of divine in an empire of human institution. It is, in truth, so expressly contained in the very terms of the assertion, that none of the tedious sophistical reasonings, which have been employed for the purpose, can evade or disguise it.

One of these I will mention, because it has a certain air of plausibility, that imposes on many, and because, if it cannot stand a short and fair examination, as I think it cannot, the whole edifice of ecclesiastical independency and grandeur falls to the ground. It has been said then, that religious and civil societies are widely distinguished by the distinct ends of their institutions, which imply necessarily distinct powers and a mutual independency; that the end of one is the

the salvation of souls, and that of the other the security of temporal interests; that the state punishes overt acts, and can punish nothing else, because it can have cognizance of nothing that passes in the mind, and does not break out into criminal actions; but that the church employing her influence to temper the passions, to regulate the inward dispositions, and to prevent sins, as well as crimes, is that tribunal at which even intentions are to be tried, and sins, that do not ripen into crimes, nor immediately affect civil society, are to be punished.

Now in answer to all this we may deny, with truth and reason on our side, that the avowed ends of religious, and the real ends of civil societies, are so distinct as to require distinct powers and mutual independency. The salvation of souls is not the immediate end of civil government: and I wish it was not rather the pretence than the end of ecclesiastical policy. But if to abstain from evil, and to do good works, be means of salvation, the means of salvation are objects of civil government. It is the duty of princes and magistrates to promote a strict observation of the law of nature, of private and publick morality, and to make those who live in subjection to them good men, in order to make them good citizens. For this purpose, the balance and the sword are put into their hands, that they may measure out punishment to every one who injures the community, or does wrong to his neighbour; and a rigorous punishment of crimes, especially if it be accompanied with rewards and encourage-

ments to virtue, for both are entrusted to the same men, is the surest way, not only to reform the outward behaviour, but to create an habitual inward disposition to the practice of religion.

A clergy might cooperate with the civil magistrates, very usefully no doubt, by exhortations and reproofs, whereof they are seldom sparing, and much more by example, which can alone give efficacy to the former, and which is not, however, very frequently employed. This they might do as assistants to the civil magistrate, in concert with him, and in subordination to him. To what purpose, therefore, do they claim and affect independency on him? Greater power never did nor can enable them to do greater good. On the contrary, it always has, and always must divert them from the proper business of their profession, create scandalous strife with the civil power, and embarrass the whole government. Would they erect a tribunal to punish intentions? The very pretence is impertinent. Would they erect it to punish, where no injury is offered, nor wrong done? The design is unjust and arbitrary. The ideas of crimes are determinate and fixed. The magistrate cannot alter them. The ideas of sins are more confused and vague; and we know by long general experience how they vary in the minds, or at least in the writings of casuists. Would they erect such a tribunal to try the orthodoxy of men's faith? Such a one is erected, in some countries, under the name of the inquisition, and is justly detested in all. A tribunal, with all the powers of the inquisition, may extirpate heresy,

or

or rather propagate hypocrisy, by the most abominable species of tyranny. A tribunal of this sort, that has powers less coercive, may teaze, and vex, and irritate mankind. It may multiply sects, render them more obstinate by persecution, and bring all those evils on the world which atheists object to religion: but the former can never procure a real, nor the latter even an apparent uniformity. To what end and purpose then can spiritual courts, and coercive powers attributed to the clergy, serve, unless it be to make them judges and parties in their own cause, when matters of interest are concerned?

SECT. XXI.

I INSIST on this point the more, not only because it leads directly to what I shall have occasion to say in the latter part of this Essay, but because I would take off the mask of ecclesiastical ambition, which even some of our own divines put on. Those of your church have laid it aside long ago, and contend openly for ecclesiastical tyranny. The principal difference among them seems to be, whether this tyranny shall be that of a monarchy, or of an aristocracy. Honest Laud went as far, at least, as the most moderate of yours, and was frank enough to own his principles and aims. The several revolutions, that have happened in our church and state, have rendered the first too unpopular, to be directly avowed, and the latter too visibly impracticable, to be entertained. The bait, however, is tempting, and

therefore even they nibble at it, who fear the hook. What they are not suffered to attempt in practice, they maintain in speculation: they insinuate principles, which may serve to reestablish ecclesiastical power and independency on the state, in some more happy conjuncture; and they do all this safely, while seeming modifications, and ambiguous expressions, hinder most men from discerning the consequences of what they advance, and some even from knowing again in their writings the same doctrines that they had condemned in the writings of others.

Among all the fallacies which have been employed by churchmen, who have thought it necessary to soften the absurdity, and to anticipate objections, one of the most absurd has been advanced, though not invented, by a paradoxical acquaintance of yours; and it is to maintain the independency of the church, and to suppose, at the same time, a sort of original contract between the church and the state, the terms of which every whimsical writer, even this scribbler, adjusts as he pleases. They who contend for absolute monarchy in the state endeavour to explode the notion of an original contract between the prince and the people, because the terms of it are easy to be ascertained. They know, those of them at least, who are not as mad as Filmer, know, that all the rights and powers, which a prince can have, must be derived originally from the people. They know, therefore, that the terms of such a contract, generally made, and always implied, may be sufficiently ascertained by reason, by law, and by custom,

custom, notwithstanding any previous and divine right, which it may be supposed that princes have to govern. They know too, that the whole body of the people, and no particular order of men, are to judge of the observation of this contract. But they who contend for the independency of the church on the state are ready to assume such a contract, because the pretence may serve to delude the state in some countries, and can never embarrass the church in any. By admitting it, the state acknowledges an original independency in the church, derived from a greater authority than her own: and the supposed terms of union may be construed to be rather concessions of the religious society to the civil, for the sake of order and peace, than grants of the civil to the religious society. Thus religion and the church are set on the same foot: no human authority can alter one, but must receive it on the terms in which it has been revealed; and so may a good casuist prove on this hypothesis, that no human authority can measure out any conditions of establishment to the other. Thus the state becomes nothing better than a coordinate, but inferior power.

The stupid fellow, who advanced this paradox in English, did not see how ill the parts of it hang together, nor that, if ecclesiastical government was, by divine appointment, independent of civil, no such contract, as he supposes, could be made. The religious society, notwithstanding their known moderation, could not have parted from that independency and superiority over the civil power, which God has given them. But the truth is,

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they were glad to get an establishment in the empire at any rate: and when a fortunate conjuncture had made one emperor think, that they might be of use to him, it happened, as it often has happened, that the auxiliaries usurped on him, or his successors at least, on the prerogatives of the crown, and on the liberties of the people. In short, if there had been any alliance between the church and the state on this occasion, it must have been such an alliance as was never heard of before nor since. It must have been an alliance without any treaty, for there certainly was none; and all the advantages, which the religious society acquired afterward over the civil, were mere usurpations: for usurpations by fraud are as really such as usurpations by force, and these were carried as far as legislative authority.

The church advocates beyond the Alps may be a little more impudent, but they are much more consistent than some on this side. The voluminous compilation of decrees of councils and popes, of resolutions of fathers, of apostolical constitutions, and of other ecclesiastical authorities, composes a body of law, according to them, which the church had a right to enact without the concurrence of the state, and which is, however, obligatory on the state, and on every member of the state, as far as they are concerned in it. This, I say, is impudent; but it is consistent with the notion of a religious society of divine institution, and therefore independent, and may be easily defended on that principle. But where we shall look for the conditions of that original contract, which

was

was made between the religious and the civil society, I know not; unless we suppose them written on the back of Constantine's grant to Sylvester, and preserved in that grand repertory of forgeries, the records of the Roman church. We shall not find them in the canon law. The French, as good papists as they are, admit this in part only: and the quarrel between Philip le Bel and Boniface the eighth may be said to subsist even now. We, who have shook off the Roman yoke intirely, admit still less of this ecclesiastical code; for we reject every thing in it, that is not conformable to the law of the state, and to the doctrines of the church, which this law has established.

This imaginary contract, in short, whether well or ill made, never existed, at any time, nor in any country; though to have been real, and really authorised, it should have been the same at all times and in all countries, where christianity was propagated. Political societies make, and alter, and break their alliances, as the varying reason of state suggests. Different orders of civil government, in the same society, change, and with them the whole constitution of such governments, as reason or passion, the interests or dispositions of men determine them. But a religion given by God is in it's nature invariable: and therefore, if a religious society, with certain privileges, immunities, and prerogatives, be necessary to preserve it so, the order and constitution of such a society must be invariable too. The church must be established by the same divine authority as the religion, and be by consequence independent on the state.

But

But nothing of this kind has been. Christ's kingdom was not of this world. He sent out his apostles to teach and to baptise, and the utmost power he gave them, beside that of working miracles to convince and to convert, was to shake off the dust of their feet, and to protest against the infidelity of those, who refused to receive them and the Gospel they published. The apostles ordained others to accompany and succeed them in the same office, the office of teaching and baptizing. The apostles could give no more power than they received; and no argument of right can be drawn from any thing that passed, nor from any thing that these men did, for the maintenance of their sect, while christianity was a sect. As little argument of right, or of independency, can be drawn from the impolitick indulgence of civil governments, that embracing the religion, admitted the teachers of it into a legal establishment, with all the extraordinary powers they had enjoyed, while they were leaders and heads of a sect. I call it indulgence, because the religious society had no original right to any such powers; because the sect could not prescribe in such cases to the state; and because they were not admitted by any treaty, but by the good will and sole authority of the civil government. I call this indulgence impolitick, because it encouraged ecclesiastical ambition, laid the foundation of all the usurpations of the church on the state, destroyed the effect of religion by theology, and made even christianity a grievance, as will be shown immediately.

END OF THE SIXTH VOLUME.

E. Blackader, Printer, Took's Court, Chancery Lane.

THE NEW YORK PUBLI
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